

New service to Dunedin



From left: Rene Bakx, Christchurch International Airport CEO, John Bartlett, Pacific Blue CEO, Dunedin Mayor Peter Chin and local highland dancers welcome passengers aboard DJ 3233 at Christchurch for the inaugural flight to Dunedin.



On 1 July Pacific Blue inaugurated its Christchurch–Dunedin service with a rousing send-off also celebrating Tartan Day. Flight DJ 3233 was flown by ZK-PBB, the first Boeing 737-800 to land at Dunedin Airport, and was given a traditional



two-appliance salute. The air temperature of just 2 degC, however, prompted the crew, Captain Andy Tasker and First Officer Bronwyn Fleming, to wait short of the spray in case the water froze on the wings

Bristol fires into life after more than 18 years

Report and photographs
by Gavin Conroy



While Friday the 13th is traditionally unlucky for some, local Air New Zealand captain and self-proclaimed piston engine buff Al Marshall pushed the start button on board Omaka's resident Bristol Freighter for the first time in over 18 years, bringing back to life one of New Zealand's iconic aircraft.

Earlier this year, I remember being part of a conversation with Brian Morland, president of the Friends of the Bristol, and Al Marshall about the beloved Bristol, regarding a few small repair jobs that needed to be done. Before you knew it, we were talking about how great it would be to see the aircraft taxi down the crowd line at Classic Fighters 2009, and that was all the motivation Al needed to start on a project that could succeed with the right experience and know-how.

Al was an engine mechanic in the RNZAF, and although he never worked on the Bristol Hercules engine he has spent a lot of time working with the radial engines fitted to the locally based Nanchangs and had always wanted to see the old girl come back to life. So with a bit of encouragement he charged in head-first to "give it a crack".

Over the years the birds had endeavoured to make sure the aircraft wouldn't fly again. When the cowls were opened they were loaded with birds' nests, and the equivalent of a full bale of hay was extracted from each engine.

While this was all being cleaned up by Al during his days off, he would spend a lot of time working through engine manuals in order to figure out the idiosyncrasies of the Hercules.

Well-known Freighter pilots and engineers such Steve Petersen, Bill Ashley, Lester Hope

and Reg Taylor, to name just a few, were always willing to help Al with advice obtained over many years while they were in service with Safe Air.

When problem solving, he would pull out a piece of paper and draw the engine systems and solve the problems in a methodical fashion. There was also plenty of reading material at the Aviation Heritage Centre's archive library, but the physical work still needed to be done. Al worked his way through the complex systems on one engine and, once finished, would start on the next.

A few weeks later, with one spark plug removed per cylinder he turned each engine over on its starter motor, a good sign that the electrical systems worked properly. Not only that, but the strobe lights worked and all engine instruments were still fully functional.

On Wednesday 11 June Al felt he had done as much as he could, so he rang the aircraft refuellers at Woodbourne. They came over to Omaka and 200 litres went into a central tank which would then be crossfed into each engine. Once the fuel was on board, the fuel gauge was checked. The 44 gallons indicated on board was exactly right.

With Friday the 13th, which Al named "B-Day", fast approaching, everyone on the field was getting excited, but the burning question was "Will she go?" following a long period of lying idle.

Local pilot Alistair Matthews said, "Al has done a thorough job. He has checked and tested all systems so there is no reason why the engines shouldn't start."

Installing the 18 spark plugs and pre-heating the oil took longer than expected, but at



Above: Al Marshall looks pleased with the results of his inspiration. Below: Martin Nicoll (left) and Ian Garlick install the 18 spark plugs.



4.30pm on Friday 13 June the port engine was turned over for the first time. The angry old girl was a bit reluctant at the start, belching out a lot of smoke but was trying to fire into life.

On the third attempt she burst into life and after just a few short minutes the smoke burnt clear and the Hercules engine purred like a kitten.

More than 50 people attended the event, including the pilot who originally ferried the aircraft to New Zealand to start its career with Safe Air. After five minutes or so Al shut down the engine, and all that could be heard was cheering and clapping — success at last! — and the noise was incredible.

It was nearly dark by then, so the cowlings were put back on the engines and on Sunday 15 June we were back for round two. The starboard engine burst into life with little encouragement and was purring away in no time, but in the cockpit the oil pressure had started to decrease so the decision was made to shut the starboard engine down.

Al then started the port engine again. It started quickly and ran well, so Friday was no fluke.

At press time the starboard engine issue hadn't been investigated, but at the celebrations that flowed on afterwards to the aero club bar, many people said, "If anyone can sort the problem it will be Al."

This was a great achievement and there are

too many volunteers to name individually, but Al wanted to say thanks to everyone, not to mention a number of companies who donated oil, hoses, loaned battery carts etc in order to see the project succeed. Special thanks therefore to Antique Aero Engineering, Sounds Aero Maintenance, Marlborough Helicopters and JEM Aviation. There are others as well but they can't all be fitted in here.

With no Bristol Freighters left flying in the world and only a few still in existence, we are very lucky to have an aircraft that can still be bought back to life for people to enjoy the sounds of those Bristol Hercules engines.

I am sure you have heard it before, but Well done Al!





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