

# Plenty of healthy bastards

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Travers Tennant waves off Merv Falconer flying a Cessna 185A

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A perfect combination of blue skies and high spirits saw the inaugural Healthy Bastards Bush Pilot Champs held at the Omake airfield on Saturday turn out better than organisers had hoped for.

The competition was aimed at promoting Marlborough Aero Club's bush pilot training course, the only aero club in New Zealand specialising in the skills needed for flying and landing in rugged terrain.

Marlborough Aero Club president Craig Anderson said about half of the 55 pilots who participated in the competition were from outside the Marlborough region.

The response from people who attended the event was fantastic.

"The weather was great, everyone flew beautifully and everyone had fun," Mr Anderson said.

"In one event we've achieved so much of what we were hoping for."

Pilots competed for the best short landing and take-off as well as the most accurate precision landing where they tried to land as close as possible to a line on the runway.

Mr Anderson would love to see more Marlborough people coming out and having a go at flying.

"It's not beyond anyone's capabilities," he said. "It's just a matter of chipping away at it."

Marlborough Aero Club chief flying instructor Travers Tennant said the club was the only one in New Zealand that specialised in tail wheel and strip flying.

An improved flying syllabus would be made available in the next few months with an emphasis on hands-on flying, improving stick and motor skills and promoting "eyes outside" flying.

The hot nor'westerly wind on Saturday increased performance but made coming in to land more difficult, Mr Tennant said.

More than 200 spectators were out on the Omake airfield watching the skies, while about 160 people had booked in for the barbecue function after the event.

It was the first competition for the club's two new Cessna 172 planes which arrived in Blenheim in November.

Event sponsor Dave Baldwin of the Bulls Flying Doctor Service said Marlborough was like a second home to him.

"I was a Marlborough Boys' College student, so I like to support the locals and promote the Healthy Bastards campaign at the same time," Dr Baldwin said.

"When I do medicals on pilots, you see how fit and healthy they are."

Pilot Colin Nimmo said the event was a fantastic idea.

"It's a way to resurrect the aero club and create more interest in flying," he said.

"Anyone can have a go. It's pretty simple, you just take off and go."