

Healthy Bastards Bush Pilot Championship attracts big following

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Innes Bint pilots the PA18-160 Piper Cub about to make a precision landing watched by the ground judges.

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Hundreds of spectators armed with umbrellas and fold-out chairs turned out to the third annual Healthy Bastards Bush Pilot Championships in Blenheim on Saturday.

Seventy small aircraft from all over New Zealand took part in the event at Omaka Airfield, attracting more than 400 spectators.

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

The event is sponsored by Dave Baldwin, of the Bulls Flying Doctor Service.

Blenheim resident Michelle Harris and her husband Regan took their 9-year-old son, Kaige, to the airfield to check out the action.

"It's on our back doorstep . . . Plus, the Flying Doctor looked after my son a couple of months ago when he had an asthma attack, so we thought we would come down and see him.

"It's really incredible. We absolutely love it and it's great for kids. It's a good way to end the school holidays."

Marlborough Aero Club president and event organiser Craig Anderson said the day had been a great success.

"It was fantastic. It's the best one out of the three we've had and I think that's because the weather played ball - eventually.

"We also had a record turnout, plus the standard of flying this year was spectacular."

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Chris Anderton, a young man from Rangiora, was a stand-out for judges and spectators on the day.

"He's only done 80 hours [of flying time] in total, which is really low compared to the other pilots who have done tens of thousands of hours."

Half of the planes were from Marlborough, and the rest had come from around the country.

"I think it's getting a good following."

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

- The Marlborough Express