

Bush flying on a big grass aerodrome



John King

Judging is a labour-intensive task. A 120m metal tape measure laid along the grid beside the cones allows precise measurement of where each aeroplane's mainwheels left or first touched the ground.

Billed as "New Zealand's premier national STOL and precision landing competition", the third annual Healthy Bastards Bush Pilot Champs, hosted by the Marlborough Aero Club, took place at Omaka on Saturday 31 January.

Held in cool, overcast and almost calm conditions, dry af-

ter an initial trace of rain, it went off without a hitch—unless the absence of some competitors and the major sponsor, Dr Dave Baldwin, through adverse weather in other parts of the country could be called a hitch.

While pilot techniques varied from the determined to the

entertaining, nobody rendered an aeroplane unserviceable and the day was deemed by competitors and spectators to be a great success. The 07 landing threshold is hoped to recover, all grass having been removed by locked wheels, in time for next year.



Jerry Chisum

The Marlborough Aero Club's Cessna 172 taildragger, reportedly a delight to fly, was the busiest aeroplane on the field. Three pilots flew it in the precision landing (best result Rupert MacLachlan's second spot with 0.8m) and five in the short takeoff and landing contest (best result Nick Milne's fourth in the Light Touring category with a total of 125.0m).



Jerry Chisum

Comfortably airborne in under 30m (the official figure is 22.8m), Chris Anderson combined that with a 49.2m landing to win the Microlight category.



Jerry Chisum

Nick Rowe not only unsportingly beat owner Ike Stephens in the Murphy Super Rebel but also took honours in the Heavyweight Touring category with a 142.5m total. While the tailwheel is already on the ground, the mark is taken from the mainwheels.



John King

Duly authorised by an instructor to go flying on his SPL for the day, Jack Griffith is disqualified on his first precision landing for touching down short of the line. His second effort, right on the mark, earned him 0.0 points to win the contest.



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Not only was there not much grass left by the end of the day, but a fair amount of 07's topsoil had also disappeared off downwind. Grant Wisnewski gets the Wilga airborne in 89.5m.



John King

The Heavyweight Touring category, although dominated by Cessna 180s (and the very sporting entry of Phil Pacey in his C206), was enlivened by Peter Blake in Fletcher ZK-BYC, rebuilt from a hillside wreck by Don Subritzky.



John King

Green flag on the line signals a valid touchdown so the judges need to watch the final stopping point.

unable to feather it, so the engine eventually seized and the propeller sheared off. There were no injuries, either aboard or on the ground, and the aircraft landed safely.

The second incident occurred in Mauritius in 1960, where a Connie lost an engine on takeoff roll. At this time there was no flexible calculation for determining V_1 ; it was simply a fixed figure in the manual. The captain aborted and the aircraft rolled off the end of the runway and down into a gully 250ft from the threshold, subsequently catching fire and being entirely destroyed after passengers and crew had disembarked.

Despite some fractures, cuts and bruises, all 38 passengers had been successfully evacuated and later posed for a photograph with the 12 crew. The airline had avoided seriously

3 May 1963, ending what many thought was a truly glamorous era in aviation.

Perhaps this brief overview conveys a sense of why there was plenty of emotion that day in early 1996 when the HARS Connie came taxiing in, eliciting a flood of memories.

Perhaps the early Indian Ocean crossings had lacked appeal for crews, who generally acknowledged that it was the loneliest sector flown with the temperamental 30W, but the airframe/engine combination did finally deliver, and there is no doubt the type has left an indelible impression.

Aviation aficionados of modern times often lament that modern aircraft lack personality. That could never be said about the Connie—it had it in spades.



Peter Clark

... and is a regular participant at such airshows as Avalon.