

## AUTUMN FLY-IN MITTAGONG 2009

Jeff Hutchinson

It was a small but equally dedicated band of Comancheroos who attended the autumn fly-in to Mittagong, March 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>, 2009, for what was to be a superb weekend held in perfect weather. The Mittagong airfield itself is an immaculately kept, semi-sealed, gravel runway nestling in the wooded hills and rolling countryside of the Southern Highlands close to Bowral some 100 kms or so SW of Sydney.

Maintained by the Mittagong Aero Club member themselves, our nine arriving aircraft were given a warm welcome and an impressive single file parking along the grass taxiway beside the runway that made our presence look a lot stronger than the numbers suggested.



It was a dramatic arrival for Ian Thomson and Irene Lawson in MMN, their PA39 becoming yet another victim of the dreaded cracked gear leg trunnion which decided to jettison all its oil upon the smooth landing which gave Ian an exciting moment on the rudder pedals and brakes before he got it stopped and safely off the runway.

An inspection showed a healthy crack around half the circumference of the leg with no chance of returning to the air without a replacement. Phone calls to Roy Sneesby in Murwillumbah got on of our new Comanche trunnions en-route to Ian, but being Friday afternoon he had no choice but to make the most of the weekend and a couple of day's extra while it arrived by courier.

The story got worse. A closer look at the aircraft on Sunday morning revealed a second crack on the other leg so Roy had to dispatch another before Ian could get going again. It was a tough reminder that our aircraft are not getting any younger and the need for regular checks around critical areas such as the undercarriage may prevent being caught out in less agreeable circumstances.

The surrounding hills with a preferred runway direction proved interesting to some of our flatlander members, particularly our President Jim Barry who flew down with John Ward as his co-pilot in CDB. Jim was the first to admit that he didn't like the "Tiger Country" of the NSW countryside and came in too hot and high.

Fortunately the runway was a pretty long one, although it seemed mighty short to Jim (and John too) as he tried to get stopped by the other end. I had a pulse rate of about 180 by the time I got there guesstimated Dr Jim.

“My hand was still shaking too much to check out John’s,” he added, which raised a healthy laugh during his after dinner speech at the Mittagong RSL on Friday night, where his main concern by that time was whether or not he had flat-spotted Cob’s new boots despite the packed gravel runway surface!



After a hearty breakfast in the surreal surroundings of the now abandoned sea of slot machines that keep the RSLs alive our 24-strong contingent got lost in a the big 50-seat coach that took us on a sight seeing trip to nearby Bowral. While the wives and most of the partners of “Her Who Must Be Obeyed” went window shopping and souvenir hunting in this charming country town, several of the less occupied guys took a stroll through the park to the charming town cricket oval where India and Pakistan were facing off in the Women’s World Cup Cricket series.



It filled in a pleasant couple of hours, which was all it took to see Pakistan all out for 57 runs, a score which India then soon overhauled without the loss of a single wicket. We didn't see any sixes, but the score kept trickling up thanks to a lot of "no balls" from the bowlers which, as John Ward pointed out, was a general problem with women's cricket .



Just time for a quick beer on the way back through town and back onto the bus for a short ride to the Centennial Winery where we warmly received in the relaxing surroundings with drinks and finger food made from the local produce before being taken on to our own private wine tasting session at the cellar room.



Not everyone bothered to spit out their wine between tasting and the couple of hours back at the hotel before a short walk to a local Italian restaurant were put to good use to recharge the batteries.



An excellent dinner and some serious wine consumption saw the walk back at an even more leisurely pace and most people head off to bed to avoid a sore head.

Fred Morgan came up with a great idea for the members when he tracked down all over Australia the remaining copies of an excellent book called “The Weather,” which is an excellent illustrated book that tells you everything you need to know to be a weather expert.

Fred donated all the books he had to the ICS and members could purchase them for a very reasonable price which many of us did. For those that missed out, there are still a few left and are well worth the price and the read.

Sunday morning saw the usual general members meeting with news of accounts, plans for a new website following the recent member’s survey and an interesting report from John Macknight on the pleasures of the ICS AGM held on an Ocean Cruiser around the Caribbean .

It was also decided to hold our spring fly-in at Ballina-Byron Bay the last weekend of September , the details of which will be sent out soon. The limited number of places for the Cape York fly-away is full, while for the more adventurous there is Oshkosh coming up in July where the ICS are putting together another fly-in after the success of the Comanche 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary fly-in last year.

After the meeting everyone was bussed out to the airport for an 11am departure, but that was pushed back by a couple of hours by most of the aircraft as they preferred to wait for the low cloud that had rolled in with a cold front overnight to lift and burn off before setting out for home at the end of a great weekend.