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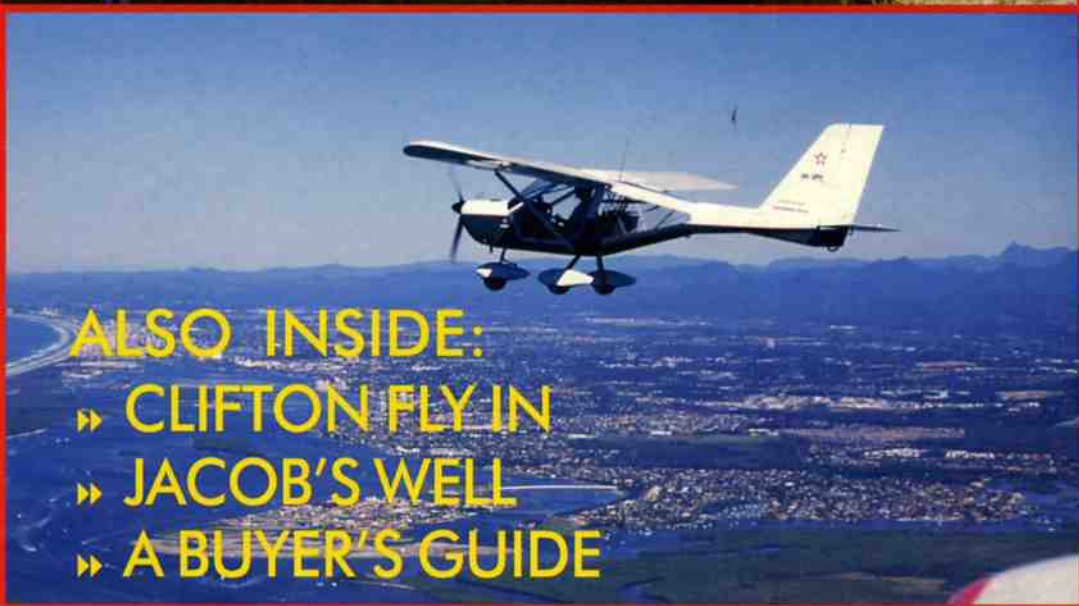
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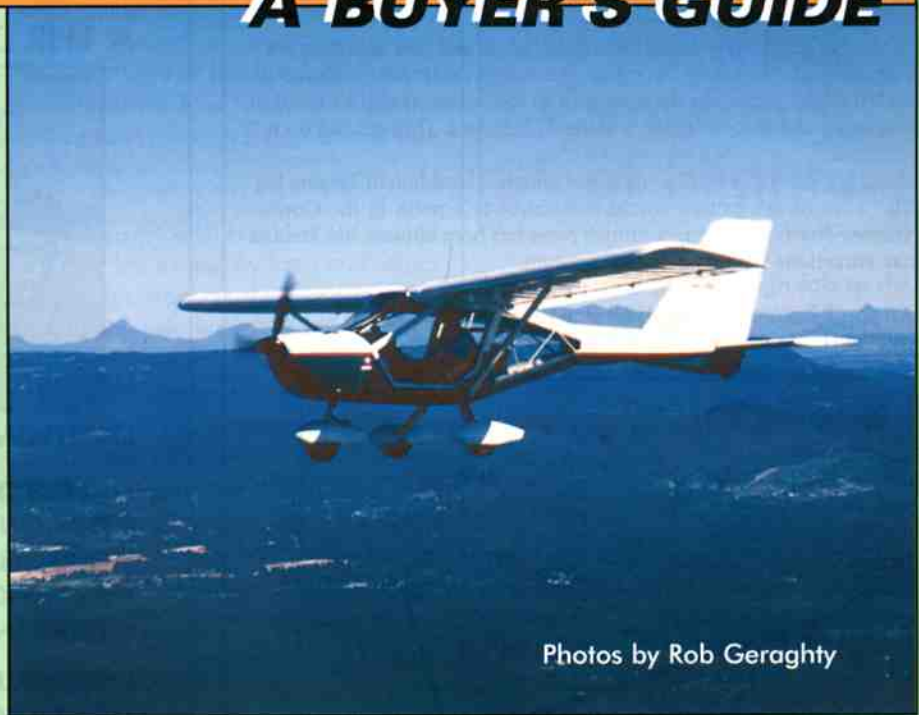
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MISSION IMPETURBABLE: 48 HOURS IN MY FOXBAT

It's 11:30 in the morning. Ahead, I can clearly see my home airfield at Jacobs Well, caught in a patch of sunlight between the showers.

At last, I'm near the end of more than 3,500 miles of flying and I'm pleased to be home... at least, *I will be*, once I'm safely on the ground in this howling crosswind! The flight data recorder on the panel of the Foxbat says I've spent close to 48 hours in the flying seat over the last three weeks. From my base on the Gold Coast, I've flown via Moree and Dubbo to Wagga Wagga (SAAA annual meeting); to Tumut and Narromine (for you-know-what). I've flown via Emerald to the Charters Towers Aero Club Fly-in and back again.

In between, I've flown numerous demo flights to show the Foxbat to interested people. I've flown at 9000 feet in clear smooth air and at 1000 feet under threatening cloud; battled headwinds and experienced turbulence like you wouldn't believe. Welcome to Australia! In the event, that last landing was as spectacular as all the others – the Foxbat



Photos by Rob Geraghty

has a crosswind limit of 17 knots. Putting it away in the hangar, I reflected on not just the last three weeks of intensive flying, but on the couple of years which led up to this point....

In May 2001 (already it seems like a lifetime ago), I was in the UK dreaming of living in Australia and running my own light aviation business – this, in spite of friends who warned me that to end up with a thousand dollars in aviation, you need to begin with at least ten thousand! My main goal was to be an agent for an aircraft as well as a variety of ultralight

and amateur-built aircraft accessories.

I had been looking for the ideal aircraft for some time – I needed not only something to suit Australian conditions but also act as a demonstrator for the accessories. I looked at dozens of possibilities, including American, German, French, Czech and even some home-grown Australian aircraft – no need to men-

Above: the Aeroprakt A22 Foxbat over SE Queensland. Below: with a view like this, over the Gold Coast, who wouldn't want 48 hours in the driver's seat?



TO AIRCRAFT

tion the names, most of them were there at Narromine this year. Eventually I found the Ukrainian Aeroprakt A22 Foxbat. I went for a demonstration flight and, after all the others, it just felt right – it was mainly aluminium construction (I'd been told that people like metal planes in Australia), plenty of space inside for two good sized people, fantastic view out, and incredible short field performance – all big positives.

A bonus was the Rotax 912ULS water-cooled 4-stroke engine, which has an enviable reputation for reliability – no less than six aircraft have used them to fly round the world and countless others from the UK to Australia. After discussions with the UK agent and the Aeroprakt factory, I agreed to become the Australia/New Zealand agent for the Foxbat.

I ordered a kit (the UK is the only country where you can't legally fly a factory finished version), which was built and fitted with some of the accessories I'd lined up – the Brauniger Alpha MFD digital flight, engine management and data recorder instrument panel, an ACI stall-warner (every aircraft should have a stall-warner) and a 3-bladed ground adjustable scimitar propeller from KievProp.

The past three weeks and 48 hours of concentrated flying have been a major test of my decision to go with the Foxbat – sitting in the pilot's seat for all that time, you notice everything, and there's plenty of time to think about what's right and what isn't....

So what do I, and others who have flown in the Foxbat, like about it?

Firstly, the handling characteristics – it's an easy plane to fly. 'Stable' and 'responsive' are words that experienced pilots often use after a stint at the controls. A touch of rudder helps in turns; it's steady in the cruise. In still air you can fly 'hands off'. Engine at idle, it will just about stall but as the UK CAA test programme video shows, it's difficult to get it to spin – particularly to the left.

The speed range is good: people like the cruise of 85-90 knots, with a 105 knot maximum. At the other end of the scale, you can loiter around very slowly with a touch of flap and enjoy the extraordinary view out – particularly downwards, which is about as good as from a helicopter. The Foxbat's huge flaperons make low speed handling straightforward. The flaperon droop mechanism attracts a lot of interest – people are fascinated by the concept! Stall with flap is 27 knots. One customer wants to take photos and fly at the same time – we circled his estate, trimmed at 45 knots hands off. No loss of height. No worries there.

Something I really enjoy is the 'Ooohs' and 'Aaahs' from passengers when we take off – breathless remarks like 'this thing really goes up, doesn't it?' are common. One man even insisted that I take off again because he couldn't believe how quickly we left the ground!

Personally, I find the seats comfortable; in spite of (or because of) the 'sports car' semi-reclined seating position, my notoriously sensitive lower back hasn't experienced a single twinge – not even after a marathon four and a half hours of headwind from Emerald to Caboolture. Economy is good – over a total of 120 hours, the engine has averaged 13.8 litres an hour in all kinds of flying.

When people see the Foxbat for the first time, they often say it is bigger than they expected – 'the photos don't do it justice'. In reality, it's somewhere between a Jabiru and a Storch – not far short of a Cessna 150.

Finally, it's a robust plane, it is stressed to +6 -3 Gs; in particular, the undercarriage seems indestructible – I know! Oh yes, and in flight you can reach your lunch in the luggage compartment behind the seats!

What doubts have people raised? For flying out of rough paddocks, you really need the optional bigger wheels – the Australian demonstrator Foxbat has standard 5.00x5 wheels and tyres and I think they are a shade too small for really rough paddocks – even with the compliant undercarriage. And people either love or loathe the digital instrument panel. After standard analogue dials, it took about 2-3 hours flying to really acclimatise to it – now I wouldn't be without it. Factory and kit Foxbats have traditional dials as standard.

The choke between the seats (for cold starts) could be better positioned, although there's no danger of inadvertent use! Latest factory aircraft have it more accessibly placed. The single centre stick is no good for training, better to have the optional 'Y' stick where both instructor and student can keep hands on.

And that's about it.

In Australia the Foxbat is available as a finished, type-accepted ultralight (meaning you can use it for training) or as a kit. Most customers seem to be those either considering a move up from tube-and-Dacron types or people who already own an older design of high-wing ultralight.

I've collected a wealth of comments comparing the Foxbat with other types of ultralight –

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M760 TRANSCEIVER



2 1/4" Standard Instrument Panel
65(w) x 59(h) x 135(d)mm
400 grams (14oz)
Low Power Consumption (87mA)
Two Place Hot Mic Intercom
3.5 Watts Carrier
25 Programmable Memory Channels



T2000 TRANSPONDER



TSO Approved (C74c Class 1A)
2 1/4" Standard Instrument Hole
61(w) x 61(h) x 160(d)mm
600 grams (21oz)
Mode A & C Operation
Duel Line LCD Display with Backlighting
Encoder Altitude can be Displayed
Assigned Altitude with HI/LO Alerts



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Mission Imperturbable: Foxbat A22

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mostly favourable! Apart from the remarks above, passengers have commented on the quietness both inside and outside the cockpit – probably due largely to the advanced design of that scimitar propeller. The payload is ‘reasonable’ at 210-230 kgs, the tanks-full range is 450 miles. The 50-inch wide cockpit with the fantastic view out is universally liked.

It’s rugged, like all Antonovs, from the factory that trained the Foxbat’s designers. Although nominally a tricycle, it has a small tailwheel – the centre of gravity is close to the main wheels. It flies slow and stable if you want, yet it is surprisingly nimble when manoeuvring.

After these last 48 hours sitting in the pilot’s seat I can honestly say I’ve enjoyed every minute (well almost!). Now I’m planning to add to the tally of over three dozen Australian airfields I’ve visited, including trips to Raglan, Bundaberg, Tyagarah (Byron Bay) and, of course, Narromine next year. See you there!

Peter Harlow

Peter Harlow is a Director of Foxbat Aircraft, agents for the Aeroprakt A22 Foxbat in Australia. He lived mainly in the UK until December 2001, when he and his wife, Louise, moved to Queensland. The Foxbat Aircraft website is at <www.foxbat.com.au>.

Foxbat at a Glance

- Length: 6.7m
- Height: 2.4m
- Cruise: 87kts 95+
- Stall: 27kts
- Fuel cap: 88L in 2 x 44 wing tanks
- Engine: Rotax 912, 80 or 100hp
- ground adjustable 3 blade prop
- removable bubble doors
- dual controls
- Type certificated versions, also GA exp & Ultralight kit