

THE MELBOURNE AVIATION GROUP



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A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL PRIVATE FLYING GROUP

Compiled by John Argall
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Cover photo – working bee at Moorabbin 1978. Photo – Dennis Newman.

Foreword to the 'Online' edition

Since the printing of this book in 1998, it is fair to say that General Aviation has hit quite a bit of turbulence. A 'Troika' of Troubles – a Triple Whammy flowing first from the plunge of the \$Aust from the mid 60s to barely 50 of our hard earned cents to the \$US – then the escalation in the price of a barrel of oil due to OPEC production manipulations and our import parity pricing policy, which lifted avgas from as low as 60 cents per litre in late '98 to around a \$1.00 today; and last but not least the new 10% GST to be added to all the aforementioned.

Small wonder that hours are down for more pilots – the disposable dollar can stretch only so far. But MAG will soldier on, keeping our tradition of providing a service to our private pilot shareholders which gives them an opportunity to fly a good aircraft at a substantial discount to normal hourly rates.

Since the issue date of the book, sadly Stan Tayler has passed away, breaking a strong link with the foundation members. But Doug Williams, Bill Scorse, Keith Hatfield, the 'three Berts' – Sabin, Fenton and Tinning – are all still with us and some now proudly octogenarians.

The membership appendix pages have been brought up to date as at the time of writing this foreword, and minor text changes consistent with these changes.

John Argall August 2001.

Dedication

To the foundation members whose enthusiasm and love of flying in the early 1960s led to the formation of the Melbourne Aviation Group.

Acknowledgements

I thank the many members and former members for their valuable help in the preparation of this booklet - and for their search through old log books, family archives and of events and aircraft details, in particular:

- Bert Fenton.
- Keith Hatfield.
- Bill Scorse.
- Doug Williams.
- Stan Tayler.
- Bert Sabin.
- Dennis Newman.
- Bob Gray.
- Bert Tinning.
- Bob Smith.
- Colin Munro.
- Rob Barnes.

I am also indebted to:

- John Hopton¹, Aircraft Historian and Antiquarian, for valuable advice, photos of many early Group aircraft, and much 'how to' advice in my search to discover the fate of former Company aircraft.
- Neil Follett, Photographer and Pilot, for his help beyond the call of duty in processing old pictures, transparencies, and 8mm movies.
- Roger Meyer, "DCA" historian, and the FAC at Moorabbin Airport for early airfield photos.
- Lucinda Clutterbuck, whose sketches of aircraft and flying incidents have added much interest to the text.
- Len Lepage - (whose oil drum 'Tin-man' sculpture has graced the airport perimeter for many a year) - for information on former owners of the pre-airport paddocks.

CONTENTS

• Preface.	Page iii.
• Foreword.	Page iv
• Aviation in the 1960s.	Page 1
• Moorabbin Airport in the 1960s.	Page 2
• The Steering Committee and Company formation.	Page 3
• VH - KBI. The Auster J1B 'Aiglet' purchase.	Page 5
• Moorabbin Operations - 1963/64	Page 9
• Tom Purvis - MAG Founder.	Page 12
• The Auster years.	Page 14
• VH - KLJ. The Cessna 182A acquisition.	Page 24
• VH - WGP. The PA24 Comanche purchase.	Page 27
• The three aircraft fleet - the 1970s.	Page 30
• VH-PEX. Operational problems and incidents.	Page 35
• Comanche problems.	Page 39
• Loss of VH-WGP	Page 43
• The 1978/79 aircraft update.	Page 46
• The 1980s –The Sabin Administration.	Page 51
• Travels with API – stories from the '80s.	Page 53
• The early '90s - aircraft changes.	Page 62
• Loss of VH-XTK.	Page 64
• Replacement Skylane search.	Page 67
• The Mid-90s.	Page 71
• MAG looking beyond 2000.	Page 72
• Whatever happened to? The pilots and planes.	Page 73
• Figure 1. Company aircraft 1963 - 1997.	Page v
• Figure 2. Group Advertisement. (circa 1962-3)	Page 5
• Plate 1. Moorabbin Airport 1961.	Page vi
• Plate 2. Moorabbin Airport 1962.	Page vii
• Plate 3. Moorabbin Airport 1965.	Page 21

¹ John Hopton and friend Neil Follett virtually grew up on Moorabbin airfield. Part of the old Follett farm can be seen in Lower Dandenong Road, along the Southern border of the airfield, to the east of the 17/35 centerline, in 1962 the aerial photo. (Plate No 2 – page V11)

- Appendix 1. MAG proposed By-Laws 1963.
- Appendix 2. MAG Board and Directors 1998.
- Appendix 3. Table of past members.

Preface

Melbourne Aviation Group is a co-operative flying Group founded in March 1963, and incorporated as a Proprietary Limited Company on the 19th November 1963. The Company is wholly owned by the shareholder pilots through the issue of shares in equal quantity to each member.

The aim of the Group is to provide to the members access to aircraft owned by the Company free of the normal hiring restrictions imposed by Schools and private owners, and at the lowest cost consistent with viable operations. The Charter of the Group is defined as -

"The Best Aircraft at the Lowest Cost"

Apologies (and thanks)

When beginning to research this history it soon became evident that the most difficult period would be the early formative years. This problem was compounded by the loss of Board minutes of meetings prior to 1972.

Because of this the contribution of some of the early shareholders to the development of MAG may not be recorded or given the proper recognition.

Thanks to Bert Tinning, (Secretary 1972 - 1986) for his clear compilation of Board minutes during his long term of office.

To former Secretaries Wal Adamson and Akshay Bansal also sincere thanks for maintaining an excellent standard of Company records.

No history of MAG would be complete without recognition of the efforts of the wives and other family members of the various Booking Officers over the decades. Of the many who have assisted pilots, I recall with great thanks Joy Cochrane, June Smith, 'Billie' Sabin, Joy Ball, and Uschi Johnson.

Notes

"The Department" when used throughout this text may refer to the DCA - DOT - DOA - CAA - CASA - FAC or whatever particular appellation the Aviation Bureaucracy called itself at the time.

CFI (Chief Flying Instructor)

QFI (Qualified Flying Instructor)

VMFG (Victorian Motorless Flying Group) PIC (Pilot in Command)

LAME (Licenced Aircraft Mechanical Engineer)

'225' (A Departmental infringement notice issued for aviation misdemeanours)

Foreword

It is often said that pilots are ready to go solo when they can't wait to get that exacting instructor out of the right-hand seat!

To be free at last of that never-ending stream of comment and correction –

"Keep the wings level"	-	"Rate one turn I said"
"Watch your airspeed"	-	"Hold it off"
"Kick it straight"	-	"Touch of power"

"GO AROUND"!

Well we all have to learn, but finally, with practise and perseverance the lessons are mastered, the skills developed and the much-desired licence attained. An old aphorism says that pride of new licence is often soon joined by pride of new ownership - but for most pilots with average incomes it's not a viable financial option.

Within a few weeks of gaining my licence in 1975 I had the good fortune to be introduced to the Melbourne Aviation Group, and shortly after was able to purchase shares. From the moment I opened the MAG locker on the wall of Tyson's fuel depot, took the keys to our 1965 Cherokee cruiser VH-PEI and climbed aboard, there was a feeling that it was my own aircraft - even though in fact I had purchased only about 25cm worth of the total wingspan!

This however is in essence the strength of MAG. It gives to pilots the sense of personal ownership with its flexibility of bookings and usage, plus the pride and care involved in operating an aircraft you can feel is your own, but without the entire financial burden of the maintenance, insurance and standing costs having to be paid wholly from your own pocket.

And so after more than 22 years membership in MAG I felt that it was time to record the history of perhaps Australia's longest surviving private flying group. A time to pay tribute to the founders of the Company, and to those pilots whose enthusiasm and effort in the early 1960's continue to benefit after more than three decades the private pilot shareholders of the 1990's.

John Argall. 1998.

Email jargall@melbpc.org.au
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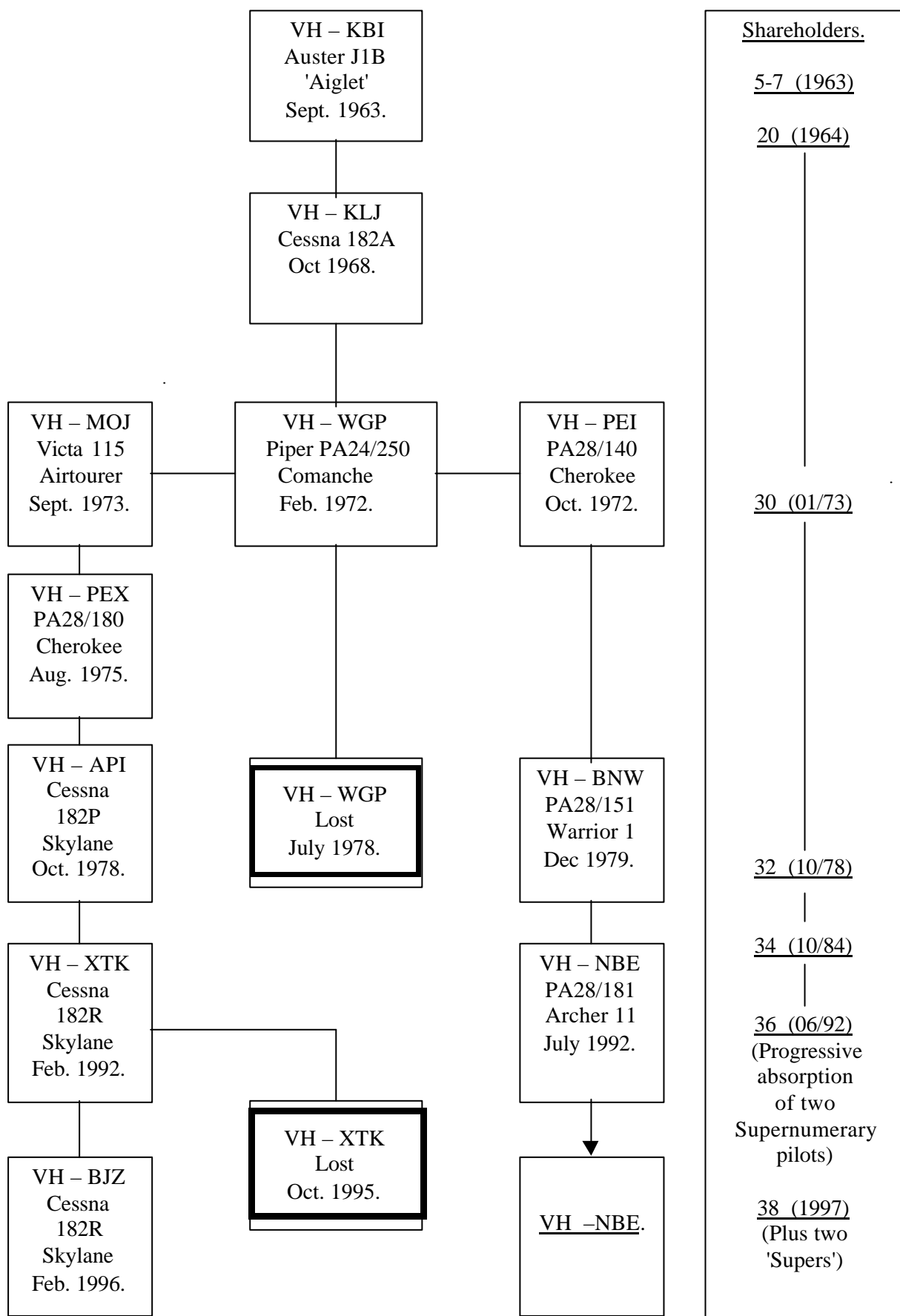


Figure 1
MAG Aircraft – 1963/1998
 (Supernumerary – non-shareholding member "on the waiting list")

Plate 1 – Moorabbin Airport 1961. (looking West)

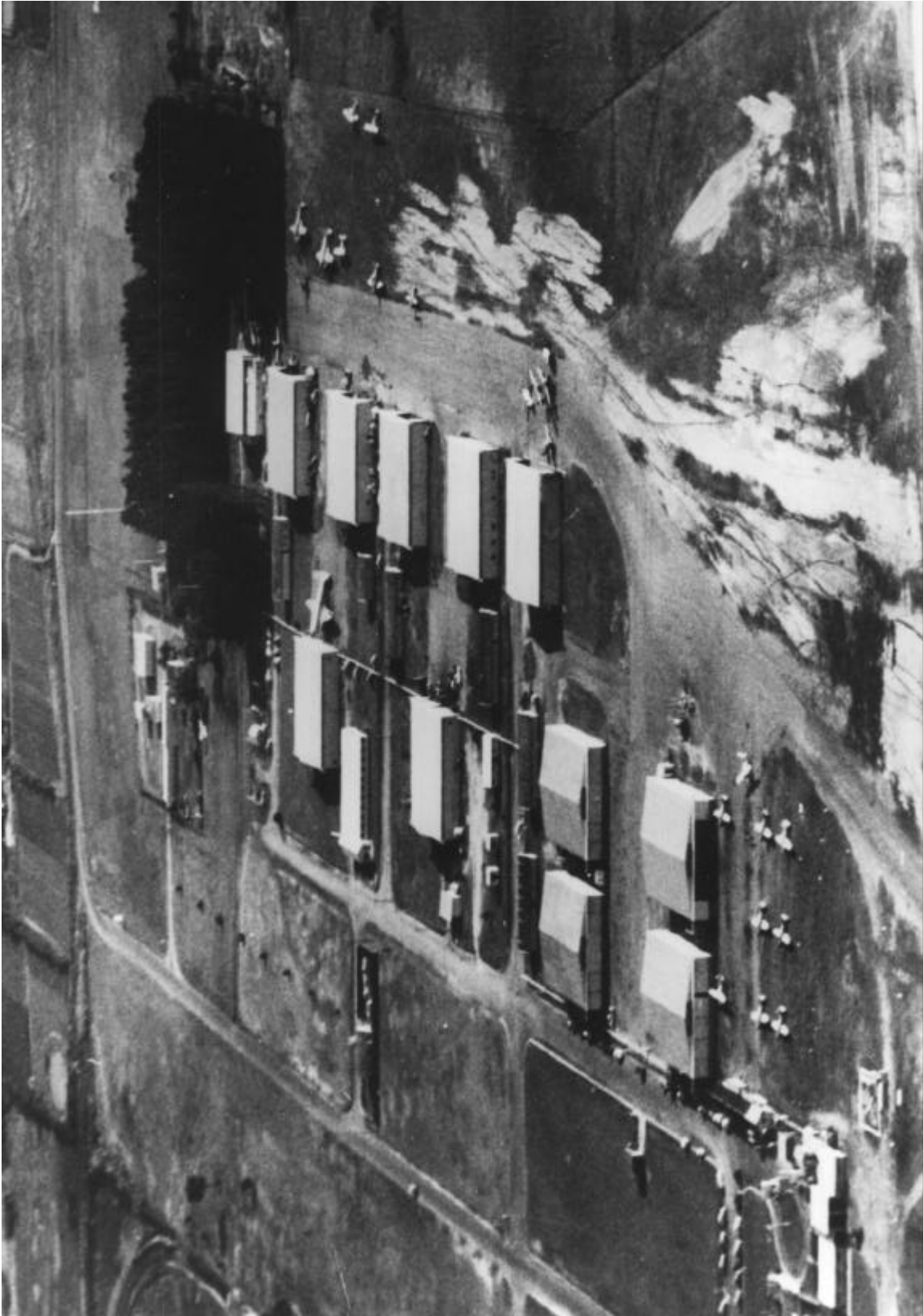




Plate 2 – Moorabbin Airport 1962. (Note Follett farm)

Aviation in the 1960s.

Introduction.

The 1960s saw much change and progress in the Australian aviation field. Early in the decade the first non-stop UK/Australia flight was completed by a Vulcan jet bomber taking only 20 hours – albeit with the assistance of three inflight refuel services in order to achieve this time. By 1964 the RAAF had taken delivery of the first two Mirage fighters, and placed an order for the future delivery of the F111 Tactical Fighter-Bomber. Also in that year the domestic airline “twins”, (Ansett/TAA) began operating their first 727 jet services. Before the end of the decade (1969) the Concorde had made its first flight, and the same year would see the Boeing 747 Jumbo in the skies.

Most Australian internal air travel in this decade was for business purposes or by Public Servants, as it was before the development of the holiday/leisure market which escalated with the arrival of the large passenger carrying capacity Jumbo jet in 1969. In 1960 only 2.6 million domestic passengers had been carried, but by 1970 when the new airport at Tullamarine opened this figure had grown to 5.9 million. Domestic Passengers carried in the current year (1998) are expected to exceed 25 million.

With the discovery of the Mooney oilfield in 1961 and the Bass Strait reserves in 1965 Australia became close to self-sufficiency and was less reliant on imported oil products. The development of new oilfields, particularly in the Middle East, led to overproduction and a world-wide glut of oil, which caused the price to fall as low as \$US2.00 per barrel. This would be in great contrast to the OPEC induced oil crisis of the mid-70s when prices would approach \$US40.00 per barrel – with a resultant severe impact on the operating cost of light aircraft.

This was also a decade in which the concept of user pays, cost recovery, privatisation and all the rigours of the dry Economic Rationalist agenda had yet to be experienced. The Department (DCA), which controlled all aspects of Civil Aviation including legislation, licensing, flight services and all associated airfield infrastructure was financed from the Public purse. This was in accordance with the view of the day that aviation was deserving of taxpayer funding, being seen as an overall benefit to the economy and a service to the community in general.

Light aircraft production in the USA during the 1960s was booming. The impact of the product liability insurance costs, which would effectively shut down the production of light single engine aircraft by Cessna and Piper by the mid-80s, had yet to reach the crippling level of later decades. By 1963 Cessna had introduced the swept-tail style on both the C172 and C182 models, installed the Omni-vision rear window, electric flaps and most of the features which remained a feature of this Marque until cessation of single engine production in 1986.

The Piper PA28 Cherokee first flew in 1960 using the constant chord “Hershey Bar” wing of the original John Thorp design. This aircraft did not basically change until the introduction of the tapered wing on the Warrior 1 model in 1972. The Cherokee replaced the earlier Pacer and Tri-Pacer aircraft, the Tri-Pacer

being affectionately known by some pilots of the day as the “Flying Milk Stool”, and who often described it as having the glide ratio of a Baby-Grand piano!

By the time the formation of MAG was mooted in early 1963 many early Cessna 170/172 aircraft built in the fifties were available on the used market, allowing wide choice of 4 place fixed pitch models suitable for a co-operative group ownership scheme. What was it then that led the early members of the embryonic MAG to purchase VH-KBI, an Auster J1B “Aiglet”, which even by the standards of those days could only be described as basic in performance, comfort and equipment level? In a word - AFFORDABILITY! This would be the paramount factor when the fledgling Melbourne Aviation Group advertised for their first aircraft.

Moorabbin Airport in the 1960s.

Moorabbin airport had already been established for nearly 14 years when the original shareholders lifted off in KBI in September 1963. The Department of Civil Aviation acquired 294 hectares of market gardens in what was once “out in the sticks” undeveloped land, and officially commissioned the airport in December 1949.

Attending the airport opening ceremony as part of the Guard of Honour was 14-year-old ATC cadet Stan Tayler, who would become a foundation member of the Group in 1963, and the first secretary of MAG after the steering committee was dissolved. Stan and two other foundation pilots, (the “Barnes Brothers”- Roger and Rob) would all be fortunate recipients of Government scholarships awarded to promising ATC cadets, which paid for their flying training to private pilot standard. This was seen at the time as a means of ensuring that a suitable flow of pilots became available for the airlines as the WW2 trained pilots approached retiring age. All these MAG members would go on to first class flying careers.

In order to build up their flying hours during their training Stan, Roger and Rob worked as “Tarmac Tugs” – a job which required them to pull aircraft out of the RVAC hangar and swing the props for the students. For this labour they received five pounds per day (\$10) in flying credits, which from time-to-time they would fly off. One of the hazards of this activity was the Flinders Island Airlines Anson, which would often appear from around the corner of Hangar 11, where Aero Turbo Maintenance is currently established, tail up and already on a take-off roll to the south-east using an old gravel taxiway of 11/29 alignment. A view of the field taken in 1961, (Plate 1), and also the aerial view from 1962 (Plate 2) show the closeness of the Anson run to the RVAC tarmac area in those days.

Originally an all-over grass field operation, when MAG commenced flying the main North/South runway, (17/35) had yet to be sealed, having a stabilised gravel surface only. Parallel landing patterns were still in use, aircraft landing on the right of preceding traffic and backtracking clear of following aircraft. The gravel taxiway mentioned was in use but was abandoned as the other runways were constructed and sealed. Tower operations commenced with the opening of the field and the original wooden tower – the second booth built on the base – can be seen in the working-bee photo taken in 1978. (Page No 42) The current steel tower can be seen under construction in the same view.

The Steering Committee and Company formation.

The desire to form a flying group is one thing – the necessary enthusiasm and energy to develop it and bring the concept to fruition is another matter entirely.

Foundation member Keith Hatfield recalls:

“In my recollection the MAG came into being through certain members of a Ground Training Class, being conducted by a Capt. Dirk Haggars (of KLM or KLIM), setting out to procure an aircraft on hire/lease so as to gain cheaper flying. That took place in either late 1962 or early in 1963 and failed to get off the ground. (See figure 2) As a follow on to that, some of the members persisted, and I am confident that Tom Purvis was the leader”.

Tom had great energy and drive and is credited with being the convener of the first Group discussions. With long time friend Bill Scorse, and other like-minded pilots who also had a desire to purchase their own aircraft, these meetings soon led to the establishment of a steering committee, which would oversee the Company formation.

In the early 1960s the outer Melbourne suburb of Research was an undeveloped area with unmade roads carved through the formerly rolling grazing land and paddocks. When Tom Purvis and his friends gathered at his house to indulge in much hangar flying and bemoan the cost of flying, the enthusiasm of the pilots was often tested by the need to wade through the mud to the house – itself a mud-brick construction.

From these early meetings and with information provided by the Sydney Flying Group, emerged the plan on which the Proprietary Limited Company of MAG would be based. Attending these meetings with Tom were Bill Scorse, Stan Tayler and Doug Williams, and it is from their youthful energy and love of flying that MAG was born. Provided that a reasonably priced aircraft could be found, they felt that a 20/20 structure – that is 20 pilots each flying 20 hours per annum – would provide enough cash flow for viable operations at an hourly rate less than that prevailing on the field at Moorabbin.

Initially, as the number of interested pilots grew further meetings were held at No 2 Flight RAAF drill hall in Raglan St. Preston, and also at Froggall Telecommunication Unit in Mont Albert Road. The purpose of these meetings was to put in place the financial and Company structure, establish the share entry price, create the necessary Rules and By-laws for smooth and equitable operations, and most importantly to engender an “Esprit de Corps” to support the Group’s creation. The Articles of Association were drawn up by Eric Barnes, father of Roger and Rob, and based on the ANA (Australian National Airways) articles used by the original Reg Ansett Company.

A set of By-laws written by Tom Purvis became the basis of the Group’s daily operations. (See Appendix 1). Of interest is the acceptance of non-pilot shareholders, probably in an attempt to ensure adequate capital inflow during the establishment phase. This has in practice never been needed to any extent, as

over the years there has been a steady flow of pilots seeking available shares. Records do carry details of one non-pilot shareholder who only occasionally enjoyed a local flight as a passenger with a MAG pilot, never got around to learning to fly, and eventually sold his share – after nearly six years membership of MAG!

With the expectation of 20 pilot members it was anticipated that a share price of £80 (Eighty pounds / \$160), would provide sufficient capital for the purchase of a suitable aircraft. When an arrangement with the Australian Postal Institute Aero Club (APIAC) to train student pilots in the Company aircraft was found to be impracticable – and not exactly popular with established Moorabbin schools nor viewed with equanimity by the Department – the nine APIAC students withdrew and further canvassing amongst the pilot fraternity at Moorabbin was needed. As most of the potential members to be recruited flew with RVAC, Schutts or McKenzies (later Pipeair) schools, much of this was done in somewhat of a covert manner so as not to alert the management to the probable loss of business.

When considering the various aircraft types available it became apparent that unless the purchase price was kept down the initial share call would be inadequate, necessitating either a higher entry price or more shareholders to literally get the Group “off the ground” and flying as soon as possible. In any event, neither the number of shares taken up or the cash in hand would be sufficient when an aircraft was offered to the still to be formally incorporated Melbourne Aviation Group.

The Steering Committee and Foundation Members.

Steering Committee. (Date of leaving MAG in brackets)

Tom Purvis. (dec. 04/64)	Bill Scorse. (07/68)
Stan Tayler. (09/66)	Doug Williams. (03/71)

Foundation Members – December 1963.

Bert Fenton. (02/80)	Keith Hatfield. (06/68)
John Pilkington. (07/66)	Bob Smith. (05/79)
Colin Munro. (06/71)	Jim More. (12/66)
Roger Barnes. (09/64)	Rob Barnes. (08/66)
Bert Sabin. (08/84)	Dennis Newman. (02/81)
Les Anderson. (11/66)	Ken Bathurst. (05/70)
Ross Bamford. (07/68)	Alan Parsons. (02/68)

Group Advertisement – (unsuccessful)

(Late 1962 – early 1963?)

MELBOURNE

MELBOURNE FLYING GROUPS FORMING NOW!

AIRCRAFT SERVICE AVAILABLE IN CO-OPERATION
 WITH KINGSFORD SMITH FLYING SERVICES AND
AUSTRALIAN GROUP FLYING AND R. HAGERS.

BASED ON 600 HRS/YEAR PER GROUP.

A/C	PIPER COLT	CESSNA 172	VICTA
TOTAL SHARE PURCHASE	£45	£65	£90
MONTHLY LEVY	£2.0.0	£2.10.0	£4.0.0
FLYING RATE PER HR.	£2.18.0	£3.10.0	£3.16.0
Nº OF MEMBERS IN GROUP	30	30	20
AIRCRAFT	GOOD 2 ND HAND	GOOD 2 ND HAND	NEW

Figure 2

VH-KBI. The Auster J1B 'Aiglet' purchase.

John Conrick had put his 1951 J1B Auster "Aiglet" VH-KBI up for sale as he was upgrading to a C172. The aircraft had amongst other things been used to check out the stock on his property at "Twin Wells". The time in service on the aircraft is not recalled, but foundation members felt that John may not have been meticulous in his attention to filling in the maintenance release!

Keith Hatfield details the negotiations which resulted in the Auster purchase:

"The foundation members, shortly after forming, advertised for an aircraft, and received a response from a Mr. John Conrick of 'Twin Wells' Station via Broken Hill. Problems arose when it was found that the asking price was much more than the Group had in hand, and it was with some embarrassment that we had to advise him so. John Conrick most generously responded that we could take the Aircraft, and pay him as Funds came to hand – the offer was too good to miss – and we became the proud owners of VH-KBI."

The Twin Wells property is located on Lake Popilta half way, (70NM) between Mildura and Broken Hill. Tom Purvis, Stan Tayler and friend Peter Fowler, (then a sales rep for Piper), travelled to the property for the inspection of KBI. The means of travel is thought to have been by train to Mildura, then either pick-up by John or by bus to the station property. Quite a trek to view an aircraft, but there are no memories or logbook entries to suggest that a ferry aircraft was used.

The asking price for KBI was £1750 (pounds - now \$3500), which exceeded the cash then available at the time of the offer. The actual down payment is not recalled, but Bert Fenton describes the payment of the balance to complete the purchase as a “drip-feed” method. Whatever the amount, the final payment would not be made until November 1964 – some 14 months later – when Departmental records show the aircraft ownership transferred to MAG. John Conrick was evidently a very trusting fellow, and is remembered by the foundation members who met him as a “heck of a nice bloke”.

Stan Tayler was given a check flight and initiation into the handling characteristics of the Auster by John, and flew KBI to Moorabbin on the 22nd of September 1963. Flight time from Stan’s logbook was 3:40 hours, with one fuel stop at Mildura enroute. With the arrival of the Auster at Moorabbin it can be said that MAG was off the ground and flying, even though formal incorporation would not be achieved until November 19th of that year, following the signing of the Articles of Association by Bert Fenton and Keith Hatfield.

From its inception MAG was fortunate in the quality of the members and the variety of skills and knowledge they brought to the Company. Doug Williams was already a LAME and licensed to work on the Auster airframe – a soon to be exercised qualification! Stan Tayler and John Pilkington were both able to monitor pilot skills and check pilot currency. John would soon join DCA as an Examiner of Airmen, and Stan later went to RVAC as an instructor. The two Regular Army Officers, Colonel Bert Sabin and Colonel Keith Hatfield brought a mature approach and discipline to the Group structure and operations. Bert Fenton, (Accountant) and Bob Smith, (Bank Manager), who often arranged loans for aircraft purchase and working capital through the (then) Bank of NSW, were important foundation members of the Board. Don Timms, (member 64-68) and Chris Hodges, (66-69) are also recalled as valuable contributors to the early years, as of course is long serving Chairman Vic Cochrane (66-90).

Top row. Peter Fowler, Tom Purvis, John Conrick. Stan Tayler, Tom and John.

Lower. Tom, Peter, with the Conrick family. Tom and John shake on the deal.



Purchase of VH-KBI at 'Twin Wells' - 21/09/63



VH – KBI Arrival at Moorabbin - 22/09/63

Tom Purvis, with back to camera – (holding Tom Junior)

Rob Barnes – (extreme left)

Moorabbin Operations. 1963/64.

There is nothing like the presence of a real flying machine on an airfield to stimulate the interest of pilots. Without indulging in the usual clichés, the arrival of the Auster at Moorabbin on the 22nd September 1963 can be considered as the defining moment in the formation of MAG. By the end of the year the 20 original pilots had already taken up their shares or were seeking an endorsement in the Auster. Keith Hatfield.* provides an amusing view of the idiosyncratic and somewhat eccentric “Aiglet” handling characteristics:

“The Aircraft was powered with a Gypsy Major, Series 1 engine, of 130 horsepower with a metal REID propeller, and consumed between 5 and 6 gallons per hour.

The machine cruised at 75 knots indicated, and stalled at 29 knots with full flap extension. Fuel was carried in a cowl tank of 12 gallons, and a belly tank made up the remainder. The range in still air was between 450 and 500 miles.

The machine seated a pilot and 3 passengers in noisy comfort – if you were very tall you found in a crosswind one of your legs got in the way, between the stick and the throttle quadrant.

The Auster was a docile aircraft, which tended to confuse some pilots, because of its very low stalling speed, and when landing into a really stiff wind gave the impression that it was stopped, when in fact it was still very much a flying machine.

The undercart, which incorporated all the well thought out, effective principles of a Catapult produced some quite startling results if the speeds were not quite right – if the bounces were decreasing in intensity, and you were more on the ground than in the air you were landing, BUT if the reverse was the case – you were going around!!! (ask Bert Fenton – and quite a few others too!)

When no one was looking landings were generally good, but as surely one “dropped her in”, there would be a large gathering of spectators, all convulsed with laughter and making snide remarks on your return.”

* Foundation member Keith Hatfield started to fly in 1938 with the Royal Queensland Aero Club under instructor Donald F. McMaster, who later became a Senior Captain with Qantas. Keith believes that he made the first night flight from Clermont to Rockhampton in June 1938. He served with the 5th USAAF in Korea, (DFC and AM, USA.), was shot down in Korea on the 17th May 1952, and (quote) SURVIVED!

Well known as Colonel Hatfield, he operated GroupAir at Casey airfield from April 1968 until its closure as a base for flying training, charter and repair/maintenance of aircraft. Established by the Hon. R.G. Casey in 1938 the airfield operated until 1994, when it was closed for development as the Berwick campus of the Monash University

After 31 years Keith still owns his beloved Leopard Moth, VH-UUL, now hangared at Wangaratta museum and which he says is now “worth more than it's worth”. At the time of the Casey field closure, UUL was unable to be flown out as it was awaiting parts from England. When finally airworthy, Keith made the last flight off the field in the Leopard Moth on Sept.11th 1994, following which a fence was built across the then silent runway strip.



MAG – First week of operations.

Moorabbin – 28/09/1963.

Photos by John Hopton.

Tom Purvis wrote the following enthusiastic article reporting on the success of the MAG Company formation. It was published in 'Australian Flying' magazine March 1964 edition. Unforeseen events would however intervene and make this a valedictory account.

MELBOURNE AVIATION GROUP PROSPERS

by TOM PURVIS



A Report on the Progress of the Melbourne Group Ownership Scheme is given by One of the Founders.

SINCE the first notice of the aims and intentions of the Melbourne Aviation Group appeared in this magazine, many of our plans have been realised. Now successfully operating our own aircraft, we can make a report of steady progress.

The group eventuated when myself and friend Bill Scorese, after having discussed various schemes to reduce the cost of flying, read the report in 'Flying' of the Sydney Flying Group's co-operative ownership plan. We wrote to Sydney for further details and decided to develop on broadly the same lines, inasmuch as we would initially restrict our group to 20 member shareholders and we would form ourselves into a proprietary limited company.

It was obvious that choice of aircraft and general operating policy could not be decided until we had sold the majority of our shares. Calling our flying friends together, we held our first meeting on March 14, 1963, attended by five people, of whom four decided to join the scheme.

That first meeting resolved to become a steering committee and we generally agreed that our first task was to recruit the additional 16 shareholders required. Through this magazine and the Ultra Light group and by word of mouth we advertised our idea. Each new member was able to introduce prospective joiners from his own circle of friends. We were soon accommodated and had a small waiting list.

Bearing in mind the arrangement that the Sydney Group had with the Illawarra Flying School for student training, we accepted student pilots. Our first setback occurred when, after exploring all reasonable avenues, it became evident that we were going to be unable to train students. The nine trainees decided to withdraw, as the cost of belonging to the Group as well as learning to fly was beyond their budget, and having 50 per cent of the Group's members not flying would seriously jeopardise our utilisation of the aircraft.

The choice of aircraft was of course a problem for constant discussion; finally the Auster emerged as our choice. Initially the Group decided to get flying as soon and as economically as possible. Of all the available four-place machines the Auster was the only one readily available at a low price. Accordingly, in October, 1963, we purchased an Auster J1/B VHKB1.

With an aeroplane, as may be imagined, interest in the group at the aerodrome became keener and once again we had a small waiting list.

Having no large overhead to recoup, as must a

commercial organisation or large club, we are able to substantially reduce the cost per hour of flying—to £3 an hour.

The steering committee has been dissolved and an official committee is in office with Keith Hatfield (chairman), Stan Taylor (secretary), Bill Scorese (treasurer), and these members also act as directors of the company.

We now intend to look to the future and already several successful social functions have been held. Plans are in hand for a fly-in in conjunction with the ultra light group and other private owners. The committee is considering dates and targets for the acquisition of a better cross-country four-place aircraft and an aerobatic machine for sport flying.

Ultimately, we hope to be able to move from Moorabbin to a less busy field and to erect our own clubrooms for sport flying. In the meantime our members, who include a number of commercial pilot licence candidates, are getting valuable experience and an opportunity to build up hours.

The cost of shares in MAG is £80 with £20 on call; with the enthusiasms and progress of the Group these would no doubt be valuable property on the stock exchange.

We are eager to give any assistance to anyone starting another group, and if they write to T. Purvis, "Windirra", Research, Vic., we will provide them with all information and an invitation to our next meeting.

The Group Ownership Scheme has proved to us to be a great success, as we have all made new friends and have gained an insight into various aspects of flying never seen by the hirer flyer.

The following breakdown of costs was used in setting the price of £3 per hour:

Fuel at 3/6 per gallon	£1 4 6
Oil, including oil change	1 6
C. of A. every three years	2 0
Engine and propeller overhaul	6 0
Engine and airframe maintenance	6 0
Spares	2 0
Hangarage	5 0
Radio maintenance	2 0
Insurance	6 6
Depreciation	4 6
TOTAL	£3 0 0

Based on a yearly utilisation of 400 hours.



Tom Purvis – MAG Founder.

29/12/1939 – 21/04/1964.

(Written by Bill Scorse – Foundation Member)

"Tom and I first met in the '50s at the YMCA where we were both members of a club debating team. We each enjoyed the fun of picking holes in the other argument – Tom in particular – and he always seemed to have the right of reply as the last speaker.

We met again in the early '60s at Moorabbin airport in Gert McKenzie's Flying School where I had completed my training. In the days before Royal Vic had a Licenced Club it became the norm that we would all meet at McKenzies on the weekends, then after a Saturday evening visit to the Cheltenham Hotel, (now the Tudor Inn) for a few post flying ales, return to the clubhouse to doss down on the floor in our sleeping bags. We were always up bright and early the next morning before the Tower opened or Royal Vic had their aircraft pulled out of their hangars.¹

¹As most aircraft of this era were fabric covered, they were usually hangared overnight and the tarmac area left deserted.

It was around this time that Tom arrived one Sunday with fellow pilot Jim Meehan looking a bit shaken up. They had been down on the old airfield at Fishermans Bend towing a gyrocopter behind a car. The rope was a bit on the old side and had broken on the third run, and you can imagine there was quite some panic as it crashed back on the runway. After this incident it was not difficult to interest Tom in learning to fly, so after some early training with Ray Bennet on Tiger Moths at Ballarat he joined us at McKenzies.

Tom was already married, and as was the case for all of us the cost of flying was an important factor. When Tom read the article in the Australian Flying Magazine about the formation of the Sydney Flying Group, he determined to form a similar Melbourne group. Following on from this, the first meetings were held in my parent's home in March 1963.

Tom was a very ebullient character, and his excitement became contagious and everybody got behind the committee, spurred along by his outgoing style and friendly manner. He liked to give new members nicknames, and dubbed lanky Doug Williams the "Terradactyl". (Pterodactyl) Always fun to be with, when we played squash he would talk to you and rib you all the time in an effort to put you off your game – but I think we ended up about even.

Tom had a friend Robin who had a plumbing business in the lane just behind the Old London Inn in Elizabeth Street, where they would on many occasions down a few ales when Tom's work at Lothian Book Publishers was over. When Tom was required to go to Tasmania for Lothians we decided to hold a small party at Robin's place, and by the time I got there they were all in a pretty merry state.

When someone queried the ferry departure time there was a rapid exit in order to get to Port Melbourne, arriving only to find that the ferry was already set to sail. Tom had spent some time as a merchant seaman, and as luck would have it knew the bosun, who managed to get him and his car on board.

There were about six of us who had followed Tom standing on the dock to farewell him when he appeared on deck waving a bottle of beer and called out to us – "See you Bastards when I get back!".

Tragically this was never to be the case as Tom lost his life shortly after in Tasmania, when his car collided with oncoming traffic on a notorious section of road, the scene of several prior accidents".

Bill Scorse.¹

¹ Bill started flying at Moorabbin in October 1959 with McKenzies in Tiger Moths. His work with Tom Purvis from the early Group meetings and with the steering committee was central to the Company formation. He was appointed the first Treasurer after the steering committee was dissolved. Bill left MAG in July 1968 to travel overseas.

The Auster Years.

It is one of life's paradoxes, given the popular perception of flying as a dangerous activity, that Tom Purvis should lose his life in a motor accident. Tom's untimely death, coming so soon after the start of MAG flying operations at Moorabbin, denied him the satisfaction and enjoyment of the Group he had striven so hard to establish.

At the service held at Springvale on 24/04/64, Rob Barnes with instructor Beth Garret led a diamond formation of four Royal Vic Chipmunks in a flypast tribute. A no doubt apocryphal story has it that the minimum altitude of the formation was rather less than the legal height – a figure of 150/200 feet being offered! Though the death of Tom was deeply felt by his flying friends, it was a fitting tribute to his enthusiasm that MAG pilots should continue with his vision to develop the Group as a successful flying co-operative and Company.

With the commencement of flying operations the committee faced for the first time the organisational problems which beset all group activities – how to control the usage of the aircraft without making procedures too restrictive, but at the same time to ensure that individual pilot skills were adequate. To assist this process, the first newsletter was written by Stan Tayler on 21/03/64 – The Melbourne Aviation Group Information Circular – MAGIC 1/64.

As KBI had operated beyond the VHF range at Twin Wells it was fitted with HF radio only, which Moorabbin carried in those days, and this was fired up by a wind powered generator. The first newsletter carried the good news that a five channel RTR-5TR transceiver had been purchased for £100 (pounds). Doug Williams and John Pilkington had taken a day off work to install and test the radio – “much to the delight of the controllers at MB”. This would not completely solve the radio problems, the Auster being notorious on the field for its unreadable transmissions. The eventual cure involved the installation of a larger ground-plane, made by the frustrated pilots out of a thick wad of kitchen foil.

A flight time record was introduced which required pilots to record “Time start and taxi, time shutdown, total flight time, cumulative daily time, refuelling detail, time of refuelling, fuel taken on, oil, docket number and place of refuelling”! The committee also announced that all flights beyond 70NM from Moorabbin would require prior authorisation. Pilots were advised to contact the Booking Officer for flight plan forms and a telephone number for weather details.

Keith Hatfield reported that on the recommendation of Ray Bennet, (then CFI at Ballarat), that a system of check flights would be introduced to establish standard operational procedures, power settings, approach speeds and crosswind handling techniques. Pilots authorised to undertake this task were Stan Tayler,¹ John Pilkington, Bill Scorse and Colin Munro.

¹ Stan left MAG in September '66 to instruct at RVAC, then on to Ballaratt as CFI/manager. After gaining his Class 1 instrument rating he went on to work for Executive Air Services, then Bizjets, Skywest and Coastwatch. He later became Chief Pilot at Sleigh Aviation in Townsville flying Aerocommanders, the Nomad, (he says he liked to live dangerously), and the IAI W124 Westwind jet – dubbed by the pilots as the “Kibbutz Klipper”.

Roger Barnes, then working at Head Office DCA, carried out weight and loading calculations on KBI, and reported that some pilots were operating up to 300 lb. overweight! Stan noted that “Up to now we have got away with it, but one day someone will get caught out, and possible damage and loss of life could occur”. The correct operating figures based on front tank capacity of 15 gallons, aux tank of 13.5 galls with 3 galls oil were –

Max AUW.	2000lb.
LEW.	1350lb.
Load.	650lb.
Fuel-front.	110lb.
Fuel-aux.	99lb.
Oil.	27lb.
Passengers/baggage.	414lb.

MAGIC 1/64 concluded that the Auster could be safely operated only as a two seater with full tanks – hardly the four place aircraft the Group had sought.

Carby problems. Apart from the radio static KBI suffered from a worn and sticking float needle in the carby, which caused the engine to flood, belch black smoke, run rough and sometimes fail. A much-embellished story involves Colin Munro, who transmitted a Mayday call on HF freq. 3023.5 when the engine failed soon after takeoff. In the curious pattern of HF transmissions MB did not receive the call, but it was however picked up by Alice Springs. They then rang Moorabbin Tower to enquire whether they had an Auster in trouble. As the yarn goes, MB replied in the negative then – “Hang on, he’s down on the eastern side of the field!”

Colin was an experienced pilot who held QFI status with the VMFG, (Victorian Motorless Flying Group) and using his gliding skills managed to put the Auster back on the field, landing across the traffic pattern neatly between two other landing aircraft. With the landing bump enough power was restored to enable the Auster to taxi and Colin and KBI promptly disappeared out of sight of the Tower into the hangar. Despite this display of sound flying in an emergency the Department tried the heavy-handed approach with threats of a “225” infringement notice for whatever misdemeanour they felt he had committed. Other pilots experienced the carby problem, as Keith Hatfield recalls:

“The problem would usually rear its ugly head on takeoff, just as your wheels passed over the fence and you were faced with nowhere to go but houses. The engine would then try jumping out of its mounts, with black smoke pouring and belching out of the exhaust stacks. One pilot did manage to cut short the downwind leg by landing across the strip, others had to resort to tightening the circuit hoping for the best, meanwhile rapidly ageing. A bumpy landing usually resulted in fixing the problem, so that by the time Ron Waddington at Brooks Aviation was reached she was

running "sweet as a nut", and the engineer in a complete quandary as to the nature of the problem - if there was one - other than a gutless pilot"

Following his engine failure Colin had returned KBI to the hangar, to await whatever work was needed to return the aircraft to service. As the following day (Sunday) dawned as a 'magic' day for flying, Roger and Rob Barnes went to the airport early, pulled KBI out of the hangar, completed the daily, swung the prop for a start first blade, and before the tower was open were off for a spot of very low-level flying – below the level of the Carrum drain embankments. After enjoying themselves they returned the Auster to the hangar. Later that day Rob returned to the field and enquired of refueller Russ Tyson why on such a lovely day KBI was not flat out flying. Russ replied that it was out of service as it had suffered an engine failure. "When was that?" asked Rob. "Why **yesterday!**", came the unexpected reply. With such a deity working for them, it's no wonder that the Barnes brothers went on to such successful flying careers.



Compared to most light aircraft built today the Auster was a simple machine, but in many ways it required a finer touch and more 'seat of the pants' flying skill to handle well. Another factor contributing to the many early operational problems is expressed in the opinion of Colin Munro, who believes that in KBI the inexperienced Group had bought an aircraft in less than proper maintenance order. Doug Williams¹ remembers an early flight with John Pilkington when the Gypsy Major ingested dirt or water through the carburetor and faltered for several seconds and –"two pair of hands met on the fuel selector before the engine recovered and ran normally!"

¹ As an original steering committee member and foundation shareholder Doug's contribution to establishment and consolidation of MAG can best be described as exemplary. He remained with the Group until March 1971, when he left to pursue his aviation career. His CV reveals that over a long career he worked for Ansett/ANA as an Aeronautical Draughtsman, Teacher at RMIT, CFI Executive Airlines, Chief Ground Instructor for Stillwell Learjet, Service Manager for Civil Flying Services, and was Head of Dept., Aircraft technology at both RMIT and Broadmeadows College of TAFE. From 1954 to 1990 he held the rank of Squadron Leader, Staff Officer in Training (Flying operations), Vic AIRTC.

Doug was awarded the Cadet Forces Medal in 1974, and the award of the RFD in 1992 after 37 years of service. Now 'retired', he is currently co-ordinator of the C-47B restoration (VH-TMO) at Essendon, and CFI Civil Aviation Academy, Essendon Airport.

Without Doug's LAME status there is no doubt that high maintenance costs would have jeopardised the financial health of MAG in the first few months, as the following story illustrates:

“In the days when Moorabbin was an ‘all over field’, Alan Parsons took off into the North in KBI. At around 250/300 feet the plastic sliding window on the left-hand side blew out. The frame swirled around in the slipstream, pierced the wing fabric and stuck into the wooden flap spar of the left wing corner wise, like a dart. Alan made a 180 turn back to land downwind with a moderate Northerly behind him. This brought KBI back to earth with a somewhat higher than usual groundspeed and rate of sink. In the resultant heavier than usual arrival the right undercarriage rubber bungee cords were broken, allowing the aircraft to come to rest on the check cable in the middle of the field. Alan then vacated the aircraft after stopping the engine and left ‘Gentle Annie’ right wing down, like an unloved duck”.

Doug was licenced to work on the Auster airframe and replaced the wooden window with a metal-framed window and effected the other repairs. The Auster was fitted with a glider tow hook, and this yarn from Doug relates another aspect of early MAG flying.

“Colin Munro and I were to tow a brand-new homebuilt Canadian designed ‘Cherokee’ single seat glider on its inaugural flight at Bacchus Marsh. We briefed the test pilot, (one of the owner constructors) on the requirements for the tow launch. The hookup was made, slack taken up, full power applied, tail raised – when KBI suddenly charged off with great gusto without the glider attached! Being a new wooden glider with only a skid landing gear, when the pilot had experienced all sorts of creaking noises from the nose he assumed that KBI was about to pull the nose off – so he released. Col and I came back, rehooked and with many other hands the glider was push assisted to start the motion. This takeoff went normally to 3000 feet when castoff was made and the pilot/builder was observed smiling gleefully”.

Bert Fenton¹ has some colourful memories of the Auster years:

“I took my brother and his son for a ride to Berwick, (Casey Airfield) and after a good landing – landing – landing, the gusset on the port leg gave way causing the port side undercarriage to collapse. This I duly reported to DCA and an accident investigator arrived to check out the sorry sight. This was one of several crashes that day – two fatal – and the event got into the Press and even on TV that night. Doug Williams bought a second-hand leg from Harry Wallace, fitted it and flew KBI back to Moorabbin”.

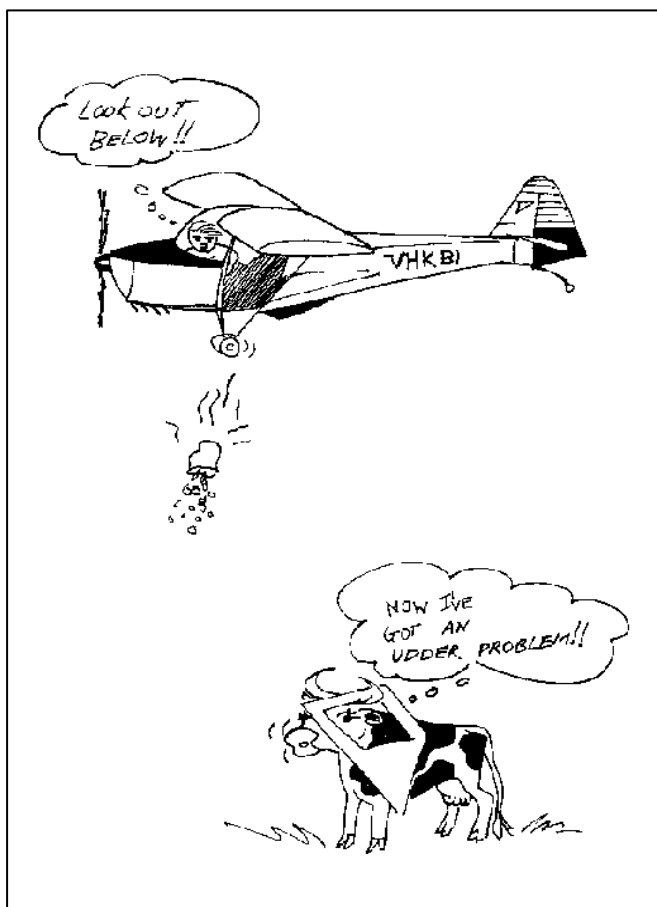
¹ After taking a trial flight in 1938 Bert found - “that I was hooked”. He flew at Essendon, then virtually an all-over field, in DH.60 Gypsy Moths. After the war he took on gliding for six years then back into powered flying. He regained his licence with Civil Flying School in 1963 when news of MAG was mentioned at Moorabbin. He was a foundation member and signatory to the Articles of Association.



Bert Fenton at Casey Airfield -- with a bent Auster!



The Auster 'Office'



"On another flight over Wilsons Promontory my passenger had an urgent need to relieve himself. After looking around for a suitable vessel and rejecting the hollow rubber handgrip on the control stick as inadequate in size and quantity he used a sick bag. I cut the power and out went the contents – I only hope that nobody was peed on from a great height! This made me want to go and so I repeated the performance but unfortunately my co-pilot didn't cut the power in time, and as I threw the bag out my arm took the window and half the door with it. I expected to hear that someone's prize cow had an Auster door stuck on its horns!"

A surviving scrap of hand-written minutes from late 1964 authorised the Company to purchase VH-KBI – after the aircraft had been flying at Moorabbin for over 12 months. To finally complete the purchase a return flight to 'Twin Wells' was planned, and this (not without incident) flight is amusingly narrated by Bert:

"Stan Tayler and I were to fly to John Conrick's property to make the final payment on KBI, taking Keith Hatfield with us as far as Mildura where he was to review an Army parade. We landed at Kerang to refuel, and after takeoff ran into poor weather – low cloud, rain and high winds. It was rather humiliating to watch the cars going past us on the highway until we got to Mildura. On leaving Keith there we struck another heavy rainstorm enroute to 'Twin Wells' at Popilta Lake and had to return to Mildura for the night, sleeping in the Army Barracks. We took off next morning in heavy weather again and became "temporarily unsure of our position". We sighted a suitable road, landed and taxied right up to the front door of the farmhouse. I can still see the stupefied expression on the face of the farmer as he opened the door and saw an aeroplane at the front porch. We had unfortunately followed a road not shown on the WAC chart. After being told where we were and getting directions we eventually arrived at John's property and paid off the last of the Auster purchase price".



Page 20 (clockwise from top left) Stan Tayler seeks directions from a puzzled farmer enroute to Twin Wells. (From an 8mm movie taken by Bert Fenton)

Bob Smith at Moorabbin with 'Gentle Annie'.

The Auster over the Bay in typical murky Moorabbin weather - September 1964. (Taken from a Victa Airtourer, flown by Doug Williams - photos by Neil Follett)



Moorabbin Airport – January 1965.

(On short final for Rwy 35 – looking Northwest. (Photo courtesy Roger Meyer – “DCA”.)

Even with the best of intentions many people find it difficult to meet all their obligations, particularly in those areas which are by nature recreational or not income essential activities. This perhaps explains the problem that arose after a couple of years with the original concept of MAG - that each pilot should meet their commitment to fly 20 hours per annum. Without the full 400 hours utilisation each year, insufficient cash income was being generated to support the operating and standing costs of the Auster.

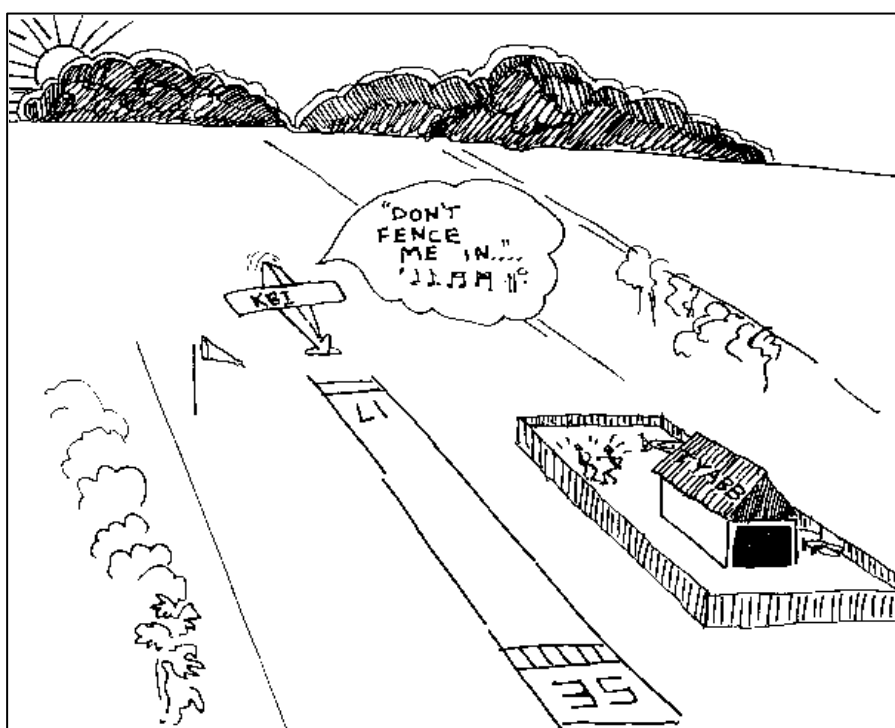
The solution was proposed by Chris Hodges, (66-69) who suggested that a fixed levy be struck to cover the standing costs, payable by all pilots irrespective of the hours they flew. This was quickly adopted, and resolved the immediate problem of cash flow to meet the fixed charges if flying hours were low. This established the principle that all capital costs would be raised by share issue or call, and all other costs met from the flying charges and fixed levy. It also made pilots realise that they had bought shares in a Company that owned and operated an aircraft, and that they had an obligation to support their investment whether they used the facility available to them frequently or for a time not at all.

Another benefit flowing from the introduction of the levy was an immediate lowering of the hourly flying rate. With the removal of the fixed cost component there was no need to load into the flying charges an estimate of the proportion of the standing cost that needed to be generated with each hour of flying. The separation of fixed and flying costs enabled better budgeting and less guesswork in operational costing, and established the Group on a sounder financial footing.



"Gentle Annie' at Casey Airfield - Berwick.

In 1968 KBI was involved in a notable incident at Tyabb, where it had been flown for maintenance. A dispute had erupted between Doug Thompson, who had started that airfield around 1962, and 'Captain' Jack Ellis over flying training rights on the field. The ill feeling escalated when Bill Vowell, the new airfield owner, attempted to negotiate a new agreement. Feelings intensified and a fence was erected around the Ellis hangar on the north-eastern corner of the field, preventing him from access to and use of the runway. There is an unsubstantiated story that Jack Ellis at one stage pursued Bill Vowell in an aircraft, (not thought to be KBI) and was charged "with attempt to inflict bodily harm with an aircraft". As KBI was parked in the fenced-off area, Bob Smith¹ and Dennis Newman² sought permission from Bill Vowell for its removal and 'promptly recovered KBI from Tyabb'.



¹ Bob Smith started flying in 1941 with Newcastle Aero Club in a Moth Minor. He obtained his PPL in 1947 on discharge from the Army. Flew with Coffs Harbour Aero Club and later with the Tasmanian Aero Club until transferred to Melbourne in 1957, and joined MAG just prior to the arrival of KBI. Flew with MAG until 1978 when he was again transferred to Newcastle. Currently flying with Royal Newcastle and RAAF Flying Club Williamtown, Bob regards flying with MAG as a highlight of his career, as six kids rather interfered with his ability to purchase his own aircraft.

² Dennis Newman started to fly in 1954 with Royal Vic in DH-82 Tiger Moths. He purchased a DH-94 Moth Minor VH-AAM in 1955. This aircraft had been owned by Gert McKenzie and was rebuilt by Fred Edwards following a severe prang after failure to retract the airbrake. The aircraft was notable for a large advertisement for 'Aspaxadrene' painted along the side. He recalls being the last of the pilots to take up the original 20 shares available in 1963. Dennis served on the Board as Chairman and in other positions prior to leaving MAG in 1981.

VH-KLJ. The Cessna 182A acquisition.

Given that the original decision to purchase the Auster was taken in order to get MAG functioning quickly and at moderate cost, it is surprising that five years would elapse before another aircraft was purchased. The need to move ahead to a genuine four place cross-country aircraft had been felt for some time, as it was becoming difficult to attract and retain pilots with an aircraft at times tricky and scary to fly, and which was quite basic even when purchased in 1963.

Some foundation shareholders believe that MAG held on to the Auster for too long, but there was no doubting that the Group had learnt many valuable lessons during this period. Pilots had discovered that to operate an aircraft required attention to cash flow, bookings, utilisation, maintenance, pilot recency and skill, plus the many Department regulations which needed to be observed. Running a group aircraft they had found was not as simple as hiring from a school, which was often a matter of, Sign – Fly – Pay – and walk away! In October 1968, after five years on line with MAG, VH-KBI was sold to the VMFG for “what we paid for her”.

Even before the end of the Auster period many of the original pilots had begun to move into full-time flying careers. Roger Barnes left to join TAA, and brother Rob to National Mapping where he flew a Catalina for Laser Terrain Profiling work. John Pilkington went to DCA, and Stan Tayler to instruct at RVAC. Keith Hatfield left in June 1968 when he established GroupAir at Casey Airfield. Bill Scorse left to travel overseas. Original members who provided continuity were Dennis Newman (Chairman), Bert Sabin (Secretary), Bert Fenton, and Bob Smith with a roving commission as Treasurer and Bookings. New shareholders later appointed to the Board included Bert Tinning (Secretary ‘72-’86), and Bob Gray.¹ When Dennis resigned as Chairman Vic Cochrane was appointed and held this position until 1984. Other pilots holding appointments into the early ‘70s include Richards Royds, Ray Hood and John Bundy.

The conversion of the Cessna C180 taildrager to nosewheel format was test flown in March 1956, and was designated the C182. Improvements were made in the following year (1957) to the main landing gear, which was lowered by four inches, and with the tread increased by 5.4 inches to give a wider stance and guard against taxi upsets in strong winds. The spring gear leaf thickness was also increased and the nosewheel strut shortened by 2 inches. An exterior baggage door was added and the gross weight increased to 2650lb. Fuel capacity was upped to 65 US galls, and the instrument panel redesigned with gyro instruments and electric fuel gauges. This aircraft was the C182A, and was the model which MAG purchased following the sale of the Auster. It was not until 1958 that a deluxe version would be produced and marketed as the Skylane model.²

¹ Bob began working in the Moorabbin Tower as an airtraffic controller in 1964 shortly after KBI arrived on the field. He remembers the impossible to decipher screech of hash and distortion from the Auster radio, which was so characteristic of KBI and no other aircraft that they would issue a clearance even though the detail was unreadable. Bob declined to join MAG in the early years, as he believed that with flying groups “all members soon end up hating each other”. He later changed his mind joining early in 1969. Bob served on the MAG Board for 20 years (’71 – ’91), and sold his shareholding in August 1997.

² Ref. “Cessna, Wings for the World,” by William D. Thompson.

Bert Sabin¹ took a leading role in the changeover to the Cessna 182, negotiating the purchase of VH-KLJ from Alan Rae at Flinders Island Airlines (FIA) in October 1968. This aircraft was first registered at Wewak, P.N.G., on the 14/01/59 by the Catholic Mission of the Divine Word, prior to its acquisition by Air Surveys of FIA. Keith Hatfield recalls the aircraft being a great favourite with the Army personnel who flew in her during the time that Air Surveys had the Army contract for charter/liaison work. Although already a veteran, he felt she cruised well despite "flying slightly side on" due to an earlier bingle.

With KLJ the Group at last owned an aircraft which had real four place cross country capability. Although lacking the range and load carrying ability of the later Skylane models, in the words of Bob Gray – "KLJ really made the Group". Though the opinion was again expressed that like the Auster it was not in the best of condition when bought, it represented a significant improvement in the status and value of the Company. During the three years with MAG the aircraft would have an engine overhaul and be repainted to a more attractive scheme of white with maroon stripe. As was to be the case for all aircraft purchases around this time Bob Smith was able to arrange finance through his bank. Though the Group had established a good reputation for repayment, it was necessary for several Directors to act as personal guarantors in order to secure the loan. The final payment For KLJ was made in Feb. 1971.



It might be reasonably assumed the KLJ had received an ecclesiastical blessing when registered for missionary work, but sadly it would not have a blessed life later during its temporal flying work. After its time on line with MAG, the Cessna would be 'damaged beyond repair' at Trefoil Island, Tasmania on 12/04/74 and struck off the register. By some maintenance miracle it was

placed back on the register nearly five years later on the 15/01/79, but struck off again on 17/12/84 after an accident at Interview River, also in Tasmania. A bit like the family axe, it was rebuilt again and was last heard of in the 'crash-comic' following a fuel starvation forced landing incident in March 1993 at Pickertaramoor, N.T. How much of the aircraft that was flying during the MAG days is still in the skies is very much open to conjecture.

¹ Following the fall of Singapore Bert spent 3 ½ years as a POW in Japan, and to this day maintains considerable fluency in the Japanese language. He learnt to fly in Tiger Moths when C.O. of 1 Battalion, Pacific Island Regiment based in Pt. Moresby, P.N.G., in 1951. His membership of MAG was from January 1964 until August 1984. During the latter period of his membership Bert held the position of Company Administrator, controlling most of the operational activities of MAG. When he surrendered his licence he had 1700 hours with 300 hours IFR.



VH – KLJ airborne at Moorabbin. (Photo by John Hopton)



KLJ with a load of scouts. (Photo by Dennis Newman)

VH-WGP. The PA24 Comanche purchase.

During the three and a half years in which the Cessna C182A served the flying needs of MAG there was continuing erosion of the original shareholder base. Stalwarts from 1963 such as Colin Munro and Doug Williams moved on – Doug in March '71 to CFI at Whittlesea Flying School and also to teach in the Aircraft Dept, RMIT.

With these changes in membership and many new appointments to the Board the purchase of a more sophisticated retractable aircraft was suggested. The Cessna had served the Group well, utilisation having increased when compared to the Auster. The original engine had been overhauled, and most of the next engine life flown off. With a repaint it had become a more valuable asset than when purchased. In Feb. 1972, Schutts offered a Comanche 250, and after inspection by Vic Cochrane, Bob Smith and Bert Tinning, the aircraft was acquired for \$12,000. Bridging finance was made available by Vic before another loan was arranged by Bob Smith, then Manager, Bank of N.S.W., Mentone, (now Westpac) and was supported with further personal guarantees from Board members.

The Comanche 250 VH-WGP was first registered to 'Parsfield Air Charter' by W.G.Parsfield on 12/06/63. Schutts purchased the aircraft on the 13/07/71 and onsold it to MAG on 11/02/72. The enthusiasm with which the Group acquired the Comanche and the regard for its flying and handling qualities remains with the pilots who flew in her to this day.



VH-WGP at Eagle Farm.

11/10/69.

Photo John Hopton



VH – WGP PA24/250 Comanche

In original livery, around November '75. (Photo Bob Smith)



The Comanche panel – (Composite photo - John Argall)



Bert Sabin – (and Molly the flying dog). Both in their prime around Sept.'79

Flying the PA24/250 Piper Comanche, VH-WGP.

"The Comanche WGP was a good aeroplane – swift, stable, strong, and with great endurance – its six-hour range was well beyond normal bladder comfort. It could also carry a big load with ease. I did my conversion with Roy Goon on the 12th Feb. 1972. After an hour he sent me off for another hour of solo circuits, and a further 45 minutes the following day. My last flight in her was on the 8th July 1978, some 360 'WGP' hours later.

During this 6½-year period I became very attached to the Comanche – a wonderful aeroplane. This view was shared by the many people who flew with me in good and bad weather - night or day.

I recall that day when we passed through an embedded CB! Enroute to Sydney at 5000 feet nearing Strathbogie (in 8/8 ST/CU) Melbourne Radar said "There seems to be something ahead of you, but it's not very clear". Five seconds later we entered the CB with a mighty thump. I reduced speed, went into fine pitch etc. I was amazed at the stability of WGP in this severe turbulence. The only real problem was to maintain altitude at my 5000' level. I reported my difficulty in maintaining altitude and received the laconic reply – "No need for concern, no other traffic!" It was a big cloud, we were in it for 7 – 8 minutes before things settled down again.

With its long range and 140 kts cruise Darwin and Cairns could be reached from MB in one day if need be. A very early (0400) start was necessary – and the help of a relief pilot.

It was a sad day when some maniac sabotaged WGP by introducing cut-up pieces of 3-4 inch iron nails into the engine. These were believed to have been ingested either through the inlet manifold or via the plug holes and caused serious engine malfunction when the spark plugs were shorted. The culprit was never apprehended, despite Commonwealth Police efforts.

I could go on and on about the virtues of this great aeroplane, in my view the best single of its day by far".

Bert Sabin

Bert was a keen IFR pilot and would often take to the skies above Moorabbin for a little LLZ/NDB work on a night you wouldn't send a dog out into. This didn't worry Bert as he often took his black Labrador dog along for company. "Molly the flying Dog" had quite a few hours IFR with Bert, would lie 'Doggo' on the back seat, and appeared unfazed by the experience.

The aircraft in the 'Molly' photo is a Piper Apache, VH-BUA, which was purchased by former MAG member Terry Woods when he moved to Flinders Island. Bert would often fly in BUA with Terry to the strip on their property, and regarded his twin endorsement as the pinnacle of his flying career.

The Three Aircraft Fleet – The 1970s.

With the purchase of WGP the Group had moved in a little over three years from a basic tube and fabric machine to one which was even by today's standard an efficient retractable cruising aircraft. Though greeted with euphoria and described as their favourite aircraft by many of the older members, WGP would have a chequered career while online with MAG.

The Comanche was a popular and successful touring aircraft, so much so that by July '72 Board minutes record discussion about the purchase of a C150 to fill the need for a local aircraft. In the final event however, in October '72 a 1965 model PA28/140 Piper Cherokee cruiser VH-PEI was bought for \$5500 from Schutts.

With a second aircraft on line the need to recruit additional shareholders was a priority. In January '73 the authorised share capital was increased to \$50,000 – and the issued share capital upped by \$3000 to \$13,000. As these shares were to be sold in blocks of 500, this in effect indicated that up to six new shareholders would be sought in order to offset the purchase cost and provide the extra utilisation needed. This influx of new blood would stimulate the Group into a further period of growth, during what in retrospect is seen as a golden era for private flying. Incoming members who would serve on the Board included Russ Pascoe, John Bundy, and Ken Boardman. (Refer Appendix 3 for shareholder register.)

By June of the same year the Board was again considering increasing the fleet, with some members expressing a preference for an aerobatic aircraft. When Ken Boardman wrote to the Board promoting this purchase, John Bundy, (then Treasurer) and Bob Smith were requested to investigate the economic feasibility of the proposal.

At a Special meeting in September '73 the acquisition of the 3rd aircraft was approved. There was a purchase price limit of \$6000 and it was agreed that five new shareholders would be sought to raise some capital, at a premium of \$625 per 500-share block. A levy of \$100 was also placed on existing shareholders to fund the balance. On the 25th September the Board authorised the purchase of VH-MOJ, a Victa 115 Airtourer, for \$6250 from Schutts.

Ten years after VH-KBI touched down at Moorabbin, the Melbourne Aviation Group P/L had grown to three modern aircraft supported by 30 pilots. The fixed cost for the enlarged fleet was estimated at \$4821 per annum, or \$13.80 per member per month. The flying costs were set at \$12.00/hr for the Comanche WGP, and \$7.00/hr for PEI and MOJ, all based on tacho readings.



VH-PEI – VH-MOJ – VH-WGP (The MAG 'Fleet' – November 1975)
(Near Tyson's fuel depot, before construction of taxiway 'Golf')



VH-MOJ. On line at Moorabbin.



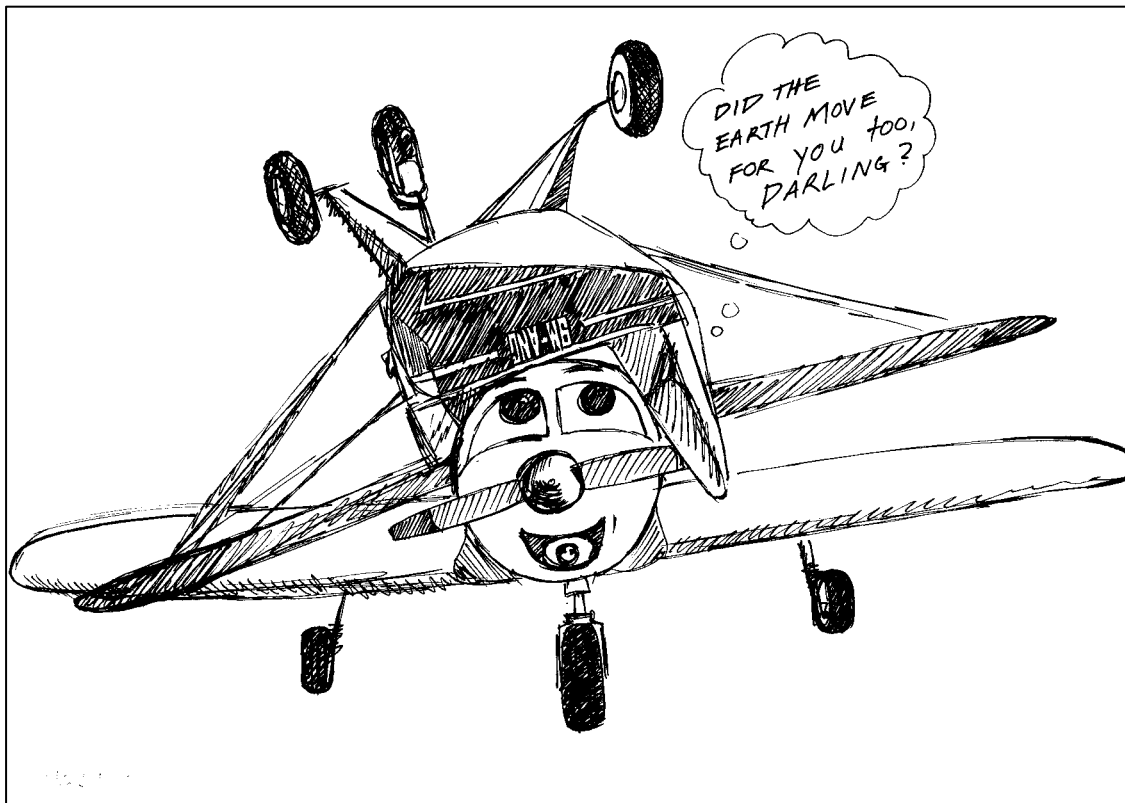
Bert Sabin with VH-PEX. (After re-spray, around 1976)
(With former booking co-ordinator June smith)



VH-PEI and 9M-AMG.

(Malaysian registration Piper Tri-Pacer)

Two aircraft in a close embrace – following a wild overnight storm on 30/04/74.



With three aircraft and 30 pilots the ratio of pilots supporting each aircraft had been halved from that established at the Company formation in 1963. This ratio would have been far too generous for financial stability and full utilisation even under the economic climate of the '60s, and became increasingly so with the Government cost recovery policies and the inflationary pressures of the mid 70s. Though the capital required to fund the new aircraft purchases had been raised by the issue of new share clusters, and additional shares to existing members, liquidity problems surfaced requiring personal loans from some Directors. Bank overdraft facilities were also needed to provide working capital. Board minutes record that a debt to Directors Vic Cochrane and Bob Gray should be paid out as soon as possible, and following the closure of Dennis Newman's personal account, the Bank of New South Wales wrote requesting details of other Directors prepared to act as Company guarantors.

The mid-70s saw more pilots wishing to upgrade to higher ratings – Class 4 (now NVMC), and Class 3 instrument ratings. Requests from pilots for instrument panel improvements resulted in purchase and installation costs for equipment to place WGP in IFR category and PEI in NVMC category. This would not meet with the approval of all pilots. As would prove to be the case in all future aircraft changeover and upgrade periods, some pilots who had reached a plateau in their flying and were satisfied with the current aircraft sold their shares. Others objected to the prospect of any increased charges or levies for equipment that they were not rated to use, or for which they felt no operational need. Argument at one meeting centered on the belief of one pilot that as an aircraft could not be landed as well at night – “Why should day pilots have to pay for the extra maintenance costs”. The riposte from intending instrument pilots was often the pejorative comment that “they're still back in the Auster days!”

In March 1974, Bert Sabin offered to finance the cost of upgrading WGP into IFR category. It was later agreed that the cost should be met by an interest free loan from the IFR pilots for a period of 2 years, when the arrangement would be reviewed. Loans from instrument pilots and levies of various amounts depending on the rating held (class 3 or class 4), would remain a feature for many years, and it would not be until August 1988 that they would finally be abolished and all contributions refunded.

Some taxation concerns surfaced in the '70s. The Board had argued that as MAG did not trade with persons outside the Company, (the whole of its income being derived from the shareholders), that a 'Principle of Mutuality' applied to the Company's business. This they suggested meant that MAG was exempt from the need to submit a taxation return. This was not allowed and a Return for the 71/72 year hastily submitted – which resulted in no tax liability payable for that year!

Despite the desire of several shareholders for an aerobatic aircraft, the utilisation of the Victa MOJ fell below 100 hours per annum. At this level it did not justify retention as a Group aircraft and asset. In June '74 the Board discussed the replacement of the Victa with a Piper 235 which was available at the time. Later in November it was moved that the fleet should consist of the Comanche WGP, a Cherokee 180, and the Cherokee 140 cruiser PEI. At a Special meeting held in May '75 a motion that MOJ be sold and a suitable four place replacement aircraft purchased was carried.

Objections from Bob Smith and Bert Fenton were recorded. Both these foundation members enjoyed aerobatics, and felt that with the Comanche, the Cherokee and the Victa the Group had created the ideal balance of fast cruising, local 'puddle jumper', and aerobatic aircraft to service the needs of every pilot in the Group.

Following a call of \$100 for additional shares MAG purchased VH-PEX, a Cherokee 180 from Ray Tinker for \$9000. The Victa MOJ was sold to the Benalla Aero Club for \$5700.



VH-MOJ at Benalla. - 30/08/75. (Photo John Hopton)

MFLICOURNE AVIATION GROUP PTY.LTD.,

July 75

Notice To All Members.

Dear Member,

After checking over several aircraft offered, the Directors have paid a deposit on a 1965 Piper Cherokee 180. Reg. No.P.F.X.

This aircraft was offered for sale by our Maintenance engineers, R.J. Tinker & Co. (who are, at present, the owners).

The purchase price, in it's present state, is \$9000-00, and after the remaining 100 odd hours have been flown, the aircraft will be fitted with a new life motor, the paint work stripped and cleaned off, by ourselves, and then repainted by R. J. Tinker & Co., for an approximate cost of \$1800-00.

This should give the Group a very serviceable and tidy aircraft, which will cruise over 100 M.P.H., for approximately 300 odd minutes, with seating for four persons plus luggage, in a V.W.M.C. category.

In order that we can cover the costs involved in the purchase of our new aircraft, it is essential that your payment of the \$100-00 additional share issue, be made immediately, if you have not already done so.

Furthermore, a holding deposit has been paid, to us, by the Benalla Aero Club, for the purchase of M.OJ., at a cost of \$5700-00.

Yours faithfully,

K. C. BOARDMAN.....Treas.

VH-PEX. Operational problems and incidents.

The notice to members advising of the purchase of PEX (Page 34) suggested that the endurance of the PA28/180 was around 300 minutes. Unless attention was paid to correct leaning in cruise this would prove to be an optimistic figure. With the same airframe and fuel capacity of 40Galls/180L as the lower powered PA28/140 cruiser, the larger engine could burn up to 10Galls/45Litres per hour at average cruise settings - much less than the 5 hours suggested.

In contrast to PEI, the higher-powered PEX also suffered from more plug fouling problems. This was no doubt in part due to the phase out of the 80/87 'Red' avgas, a move which forced the use of the higher lead content 100/115 'Green' brew in an engine designed for the old lower octane fuel. It was a model very prone to carby icing, and to lessen the problem of roughness some pilots felt it best to 'run it hard – run it hot', in order to get smoother running. As the tachometer had a red band prohibiting sustained operation between 2100-2300 RPM, (refer panel photo page 49) power settings were usually kept above this level. These factors no doubt contributed to the forced landing incident on the weekend of 26/27 January, 1976.(Refer page 36)

PEX - forced landing.

The MAG pilot had flown to Yarrawonga, a distance of around 130/140 miles on Saturday spent some time in local flying, and departed for Moorabbin on the Sunday afternoon. Approaching Vermont to the Northeast of MB the engine failed due to fuel exhaustion – fortunately near the only clear area in an otherwise built-up suburb. As the aircraft was undamaged it only required refuelling in order to be flown on to Moorabbin the following day.

As would be expected this incident was subject to a Departmental inquiry. However it might be assumed that the pilot would be required to revise his knowledge of flight planning, fuel consumption and endurance calculations -- and perhaps to re-sit his exams. But the penalty imposed on the pilot was a flight test including forced landing practise – surely the very thing he had competently demonstrated under genuine emergency flight conditions!



● **HAPPY to land safely . . . Pilot David Morgan and passengers John Kelley, Julie Chivers and Trevor Jowett.**

Plane 'just over house'



● **THE Piper Cherokee intact after the forced landing.**

FOUR people escaped injury when their light plane was forced to land in a paddock at Vermont South last night.

A witness living nearby said the plane just cleared his house.

The single-engine Piper Cherokee ran out of fuel.

It was not damaged. It was forced down in a paddock behind Vermont South shopping centre off Burwood Rd. about 8.10 p.m.

The occupants were returning to Moorabbin Airport after a weekend holiday at Yarrawonga.

They were the pilot, Mr David Morgan, and passengers Trevor Jowett, Julie Chivers and John Kelley.

Mr Jowett said he told Julie Chivers to brace herself and hang on when he realised they would have to land.

"She nearly tore my arm out," he said.

Mr William Weir of Jolimont Rd., Forest Hill, said the plane's engine

was out when it passed only about 10 metres above his home about 8.05 p.m.

A Transport Department spokesman, Mr Ken Williams, said the plane had radioed Moorabbin before crash-landing to report engine trouble.

Mr Albert Dauksa, of Harradine Cres., who saw the plane land, said: "There was no doubt it was an emergency landing.

"I saw this plane approaching from the north. I was standing beside the garage.

"It just got over the house, dipped into the paddock and landed."

Mr Dauksa said the landing was "really unbelievable," and that the pilot did an amazing job.

Mr Dauksa said he was first on the scene, and the pilot "just jumped out, and rushed to a house to phone someone."

**WELL DONE
PEX
WELL DONE
MAG**

Newspaper report the following day of the forced landing incident – with computer 'slight of hand' enhancement of "Well done Peg (and) Max" – but appropriate comment nevertheless!

Another forced landing incident in PEX made a headline story in the local newspaper, as the following first-hand report from Ian Latham illustrates:

A Night to Remember.

“On Tuesday 16th October 1979 Bert Sabin planned a night ILS into Essendon in PEX. He invited a fellow employee, his wife and myself to accompany him as passengers.

The take-off on Rwy 13 was normal until the engine stopped at around 100 feet. Bert’s reaction was instantaneous and we were back on the ground again before the airport fence. In the short rough ground roll that followed touchdown a fence post ruptured the port fuel tank, and we came to rest on a fairway of the Moorabbin Municipal Golf Course. I recall that Bert was concerned to capture the fuel that was now watering the course.

Fortunately the new Police helicopter was performing touch and go landings and was almost immediately overhead with a dazzling search light trained on us. It was a very dark night but this assistance allowed us to exit the aircraft and survey the damage. At the time it reminded me of a scene from “Close Encounters of a Third Kind”.

The airport fire service was soon on the scene and ferried us back to the Briefing Office. I arrived home just in time to see a report of our accident on the late news. The following day, the Herald featured a photo of a bewildered golfer trying to work out the rules for playing past this new hazard, and quotes by Bert describing the accident. This was followed by local councillors calling for the closure of the airport, and a quote supposedly from DOT that it “would discontinue pilot training at the airport in five years time”. Fortunately neither of these events has occurred.

Bert and I decided that we should ‘jump back on the horse’ as soon as possible and flew PEI the following weekend. I also flew API in preparation for a trip to the Nullabor that Bert and I had planned for the following weekend.

As far as I know the reason for the engine failure was not found. Speculation centered on fuel starvation by either carburettor icing or venting from the fuel filter drain. There was talk of testing the latter possibility by finding a long runway and performing an aborted take off with the fuel drain open”.

Ian Latham.¹

¹ Ian Latham was introduced to flying by Bert Sabin and joined MAG in September '78 after completing his restricted training at Berwick with Colonel Hatfield's GroupAir. He joined the Board following the resignation of Dennis Newman in March '81 and became Financial Administrator in August '85, after the abolition of the Company Administrator position, formerly held by Bert Sabin. He held that position until early 1998 - a record period in office of over 12 years service to MAG!

"LIVES ARE ENDANGERED"



● Aviation engineers dismantle the engine of the Piper aircraft which crashed-landed in the Moorabbin Municipal Golf Course adjacent to the airfield.

SIR, — As pilot in command of the Piper Cherokee (VH-PEX) which made a forced landing, shortly after take-off from Moorabbin Airport at about 7.50 p.m. on Tuesday, October 18, may I make a few comments and pose some questions?

Firstly, the aircraft did not crash. The main damage was a substantial dent in the port wing. This occurred after the aircraft had landed when it struck a post in the boundary fence. My passengers remarked that they did not even need their seat-belts, so gentle was the touchdown, etc. However, I do not propose to quibble over the use of a few words.

Here we have a situation where an aeroplane suffers minor damage and a fence post is knocked out. Had it been a car, it could have passed unreported.

Yet, there has been a further hysterical outburst by some responsible "leaders" to close and relocate the airport of Moorabbin.

I find it incredible that such a minor incident could lead to such reaction from persons elected to administer the affairs of our fair city. What would they say and do in a real crisis?

I have two questions:

1. — How many people (and animals) on the ground have been killed or injured as a result of aircraft operations since the aerodrome was commissioned more than 30 years ago? Also, apart from the post knocked out what damage to property has occurred?

2. — Who authorised the construction of these residences and buildings in this so-called "danger zone" surrounding the aerodrome?

And why? (I suspect it was the mighty dollar).

In conclusion, let me say that my confidence in our elected leaders would be much greater if they refrained from such "exclamations hyperbolic."

I am sure there are many worthwhile tasks waiting to be done requiring determined leadership and sound judgment than attempts to close an airport, the advent of which, years ago, was hailed with enthusiasm by the civic leaders of the day.

— H. L. Sabin, Galdwyn Ave., East Bentleigh.

Hysterical reaction

AIRPORT ENQUIRY SOUGHT

PLANE CRASHES ON GOLF COURSE

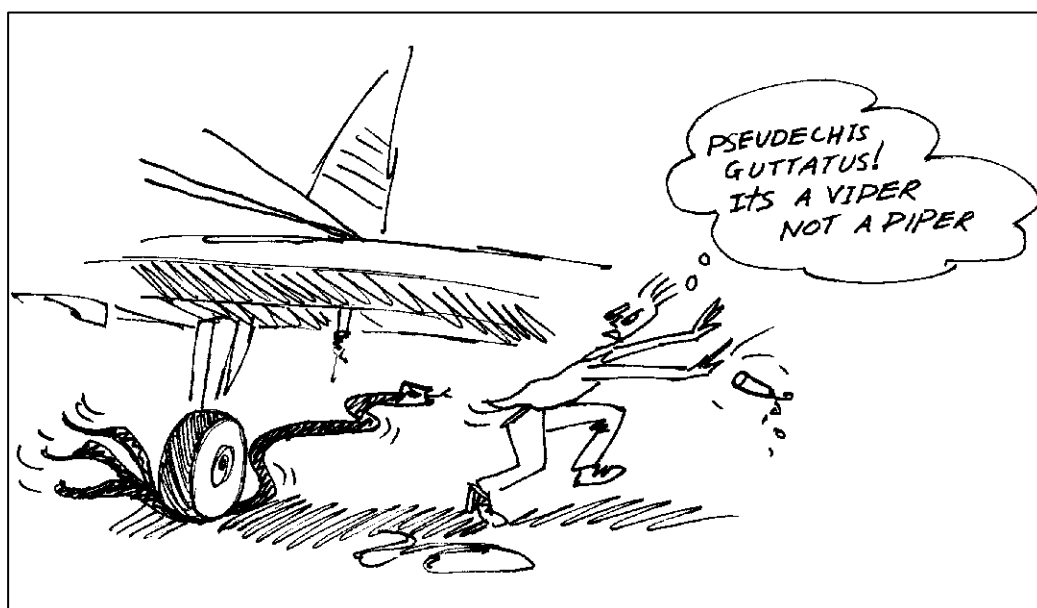
The pilot and three passengers of a light plane escaped injury when it crashed on to Moorabbin Golf Course last week.

The single engine Piper Cherokee, owned by Melbourne Aviation Group, was taking off on a local flight from Moorabbin Airport when it suffered engine failure, careered through a fence and onto the course. The plane suffered only minor damage.

Collage of local newspaper reports – and Bert's letter in response.

Not all problems with PEX had the potential to produce serious outcomes, but perhaps the following story from a former member had its own health hazards!

Frank Kelberg had flown PEX to a private strip at Glenmaggie Lake. After landing he and his passengers pushed the Piper off the strip into a long uncut grassed area for the night. Next morning Frank crawled under the wing for a fuel drain check – and found himself face to face with a very irate black snake! After beating a hasty retreat a suitable implement was found and the snake duly despatched. On pulling PEX forward they found that the aircraft wheel had in fact been rolled on to the snake's tail trapping it on the previous day, hence its rather ugly mood. Frank's D/I very nearly became a Deadly Incident!



'Pseudechis Guttatus' – (a black snake!)

Comanche problems.

Prior to MAG ownership of WGP some repair or overhaul work had been undertaken interstate by the previous owners, Parsfield Air Charters, during which a bearing was fitted incorrectly to the engine. This problem would not surface for some time, but surface it would eventually with expensive and near catastrophic results.

In March 1973 the Comanche was damaged in a landing accident at a private strip on a farmer's property near Porepunka. The aircraft with four POB came in a little too hot and touched down about 1000 feet along the strip. The strip was narrow with rough ploughed edges, and as it was early morning the grass may have had a light frost on it making braking ineffective. Realising that he was in trouble the pilot attempted to ground loop the aircraft, but when the port wheel drifted into the ploughed area the Comanche slewed to the left and the port gear

collapsed. There were no injuries. Ray Tinker, (LAME) travelled to the strip, jacked the aircraft up and managed to lock the gear down with the help of a bar assembled between the wheels. Vic Cochrane was then able to fly WGP back to Moorabbin for further repairs.

It was late in 1973 that the incorrectly fitted engine bearing caused a complete engine failure – fortunately in the Moorabbin circuit area. Russ Pascoe¹ was PIC and managed to put the Comanche down on Rwy 22 without any structural damage. When the engine failure was traced to the faulty bearing installation, the Board sought legal opinion regarding litigation against the interstate workshop and the previous owners. This was not proceeded with as it was found to be difficult to sue Air Charters through the transfer of ownership and to apportion liability. The \$2400 cost of this maintenance had to be borne by the MAG shareholders.

In October 1975 another engine failure occurred with Bert Sabin and Ray Tinker on board. This was to be a test flight to check on running problems, but the engine failed on full power roll and was brought to a stop on the runway. Subsequent investigation revealed malicious damage to the engine due to a deliberate act of vandalism. Metal pieces, believed to be cut up nails, were thought to have been introduced into the engine either through the plug holes or via the oil filler cap. Repair costs totalled \$2000, but on this occasion the bill was covered by insurance, MAG meeting only the excess. (Refer notice to members on page 41)

An engine overhaul carried out in late '76 that cost \$5500, and the three year major airframe inspection in '77 were both costly and greatly in excess of budget estimates. During the major it was found that both fuel bladders were leaking, and that the four flap tracks needed to be replaced. An initial estimate of \$3500 blew out to around \$7000. Even with an overdraft increase to \$5000, there was an expected shortfall of \$3000. This placed a heavy strain on the Company finances at a time of continuing inflationary trends and rising fuel costs.

Early in 1976 a MAG pilot breasting the bar at RVAC overheard a pilot boasting about flying a PA24 Comanche in an Air-race. When he asked for more details he discovered the aircraft was WGP, which had been 'loaned' to the non-MAG pilot. At no stage during the race was there a MAG pilot on board flying the Comanche! Further investigation revealed an unauthorised listing of WGP in the Comanche Society, with several non-MAG pilots registered as owners!

In 1978, following another air-race, some damage was caused to the paint work by a sponsor's logo, where it had been attached to the aircraft fuselage. The Comanche was then completely repainted, with the errant pilot required to make a payment of \$200 towards the respray cost of \$425.

¹ Russ Pascoe joined MAG in October 1972. He completed his navigation training in PEI, and subsequently gained an instructors rating mainly in the Victa MOJ. He became a member of the Board in '74 and was a Director until '79. He left MAG in August '81 to pursue his flying career. He joined IPEC flying Argosy freighters on the Tassie run, and later made it into TAA – a few weeks prior to the airline strike in 1989! Though he was able to fly in Australia during the Compass 1 period, he is now based overseas with Air India, flying an Airbus 300 out of Bombay.

VH. WGP - VANDALISM

WGP has been subjected to an act of Vandalism (or sabotage) by some person(s). A number of metal pieces (we think pieces of 4" nails) were deliberately introduced into the induction system (probably via the hot air intake) some time before 20th Sept 1975. The resultant damage to 5 cylinders, pistons, valves etc has cost about \$2000 to repair. This, we hope, will be accepted by insurance.

We do not know if WGP was specially selected for this criminal (and homicidal) act or whether it was a random act of vandalism.

The Commonwealth Police are investigating and may wish to interview you at some time.

Fortunately no loss of life or structural damage occurred; but there were 3 cases of power failure on take off which could have had fatal results.

As you will realise there is no absolute protection against this sort of thing, however we have taken steps to detect any recurrence.

All WGP Pilots - If, when you start the engine, there is any roughness or vibration present shut down immediately and report to me.

This is a sorry episode in our history. Let's hope the Police apprehend the culprit.

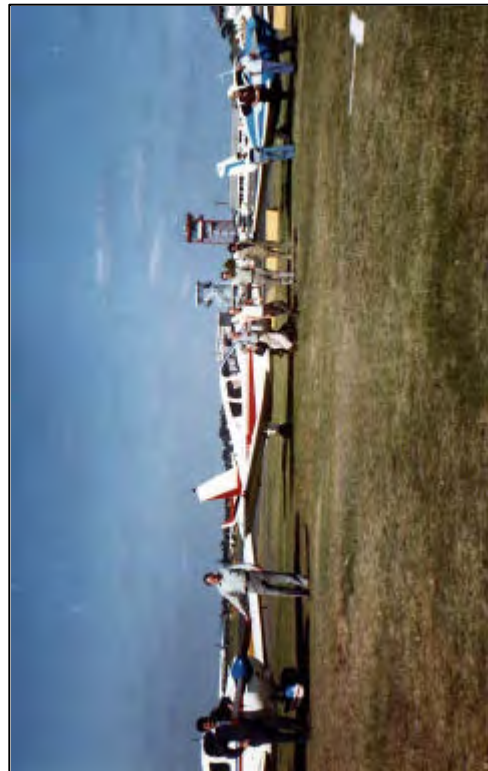
Bert Sabin
Maint. Officer 14/10/75

Notification from Bert Sabin detailing the Comanche vandalism.

A Working-bee Session – May 1978 (VH-PEX – VH-PEI – VH-WGP)

(Top left) Bert Sabin (3rd from left), Bob Smith (pointing), Vic Cochrane (back to camera), Terry Woods (wingtip), Des Walker (right) working on PEX.

(Bottom left) Bert Tinning (2nd from left). **(Bottom right)** (L-R) Bert Sabin, Dennis Newman and Bob Gray under PEI.





The Comanche receives some 'TLC' following the respray. (May '78)

(Known pilots) Phil Dear near door. Des Walker at spinner.

Not long after this picture was taken VH-WGP was destroyed at Inglewood, near Bendigo. On the 14th July 1978, after nearly 15 years of safe operations, Barry Westcott and his three passengers tragically lost their lives during an attempted emergency landing.

Loss of VH-WGP.

Barry Westcott had been a member of MAG since April 1969. When requesting a booking on WGP for July 14th 1978 to fly to Broken Hill with three friends for a shooting holiday, he had in accordance with Company rules undertaken a recency flight with Board member Bert Sabin.

The familiarisation flight was made on the previous weekend when he was considered to meet Company standards, and to have displayed a satisfactory level of flying skill and currency with the Comanche and its aircraft systems.

After loading his passengers on the Friday morning, the aircraft departed from Moorabbin around 11AM tracking via the Western lane enroute to Mildura. At 12.00PM when abeam Bendigo to the West, Barry notified Flight Service of a loss of oil pressure, and advised them that he was looking for a landing area. A short time later he indicated that he had located a suitable field and was intending to put the aircraft down there. This was the last communication with WGP.

The official report stated that the loss of oil pressure was caused by a broken oil line to the oil cooler, but at the time of the crash the engine was still under power and operating normally.

The report concluded that – “While making an emergency approach to land necessitated by an engine malfunction, the pilot did not maintain adequate flying speed”.



Learning to Fly at Berwick.

Although he had not been involved with MAG for many years, a useful and informal association was maintained during the 1970s with Keith Hatfield via his GroupAir Flying School. On occasions an aircraft would be based at Berwick for a couple of weeks so that pilots could complete their navigation training in the Group aircraft. Bruce Bezant and Ian Latham took advantage of this arrangement, and Ian has fond memories of his flying training at Casey airfield.

“Bert Sabin introduced me to Keith Hatfield, a founding member of MAG, who ran GroupAir Flying School at Casey Airfield, Berwick. I had a trial flight with the legendary instructor Bill Campbell-Hicks who declared that I had some flying ability.

My formal training started with CHR, a Piper PA28/140, in July 1978. At the conclusion of my first lesson another instructor asked if I was associated with MAG and told me that WGP had crashed at Inglewood a few hours earlier with the loss of four men.

This crash followed the loss of two lives at Torquay the previous day, six lives at Essendon on the Monday of the same week, and two lives off Wilson’s Promontory two weeks earlier. Although obviously concerned that my new recreation had claimed fourteen lives in two weeks I continued my daily instruction and passed my restricted licence 2 ½ weeks later.

I remember my first solo and also another landing on runway 30 a day or two later. The runway at Berwick was a particularly narrow strip of gravel and I was almost on it when a northerly gust blew me off the runway. The torque effect of applying full power from idle caused a wing to dip before I climbed away.

Colonel Hatfield must have observed this as he talked me through the next approach and landing.

Berwick was a challenging but idyllic place to learn to fly. The drive down the freeway was easy, the township was delightful for a lunch break and the airport buildings though fairly basic army style huts were nicely situated amongst the trees. Runway 12/30 had a railway line at the western end, a hill and a road at the eastern end, and the late afternoon sun could be a real problem when landing on 30. A northerly wind coming over the hills could also make landings quite interesting. On the credit side was the friendly staff and a perfectly situated ‘chook-house’ at the base turning point for 30.

Having completed my Restricted flying training (GFPT) at Casey I immediately joined MAG and started flying PEI from Moorabbin. I returned to Berwick in March ’79 to undertake my Navigation training, and passed my Unrestricted test in the MAG Cherokee cruiser PEI”.

Ian Latham

The 1978/79 Aircraft update.

Following the tragic loss of Barry Westcott and the Comanche, the Board met to consider the options for a replacement aircraft. In view of the fact that the Company had been recording a loss in operations over recent months, a Financial Planning Committee, (FPC), under the Chairmanship of Bert Sabin, with maintenance officers John Argall and Terry Woods, was formed to establish the financial parameters. Their brief provided for a purchase limit of \$23,000 if the Group continued to operate three aircraft and \$30,000 if the fleet was reduced to two aircraft. Ken Boardman and Russ Pascoe were to investigate suitable aircraft types, and Vic Cochrane and John Argall authorised to search for an aircraft within the guidelines.

In October 1978 a 1973 model Cessna C182P Skylane was bought from Civil Aircraft Sales. Alan Pilgrim, who had recently purchased an A36 Bonanza, VH-APG, had owned VH-API from new. The aircraft was in superb condition with only 960 hours total time. Purchase price was \$31,000. As the price exceeded the authorised limit some dissent was voiced, given the operating loss, falling utilisation, and increasing fuel and maintenance costs. This situation was exacerbated by the imminent engine overhaul of the Cherokee PEI. A proposal was considered to store the Piper when the engine hours ran out until such time as utilisation justified its reactivation.

A report from the FPC recommended that an overdraft of \$10,000 repayable over 5 years be sought. Repayments and interest on this would have adversely impacted on flying rates and levies. To resolve this a further 240 shares were issued at par, and the total of shareholders increased by two immediately, with a further increase to 34 over the next two years. This increase in the shareholder base to a large extent eliminated the Capital shortfall after the receipt of the WGP insurance payment. In March, prior to its loss, the insured value of WGP had fortunately been increased to \$20,000 hull cover.

Utilisation with API was set at 300 hours per annum, and it would over time prove to be a popular cruising aircraft making many interstate and outback trips. A similar figure of 300 hours was set for PEX, with PEI handling most of the local bookings with an estimated 200 hours per year. This total of 800 hours was not achieved, and average pilot hours fell below 20 hours instead of the 24 hours per year ideally needed for cash flow and pilot currency. Following a questionnaire which included the possible winding up of the Company and distribution of the Group assets, a motion "That the Company's fleet be reduced to two aircraft" was carried at the AGM in 1979. (refer page 47) The PA28 Pipers were quickly sold - PEI to shareholder Phil Dear for \$8250, and PEX interstate for \$11,500.

In December '79 a 1975 Piper Warrior 1 was purchased for \$24,000 from the late Fred Blake. VH-BNW had a TTIS of 2120 hours with a full life engine, and was upgraded to Limited IFR by Blakes. The reduction in standing costs with only 2 aircraft enabled the monthly levy to be reduced. Utilisation was set at 350 hours for BNW, with API reduced to 200 hours per year. This represented only an average utilisation of 1.5 hours per pilot each month. However the change in pilot/aircraft ratio from 30/3 to 34/2 would resolve the financial problems, and

herald a period of great stability. API and BNW would operate with MAG for the next 13 years, until the 91/92 update!

MELBOURNE AVIATION GROUP PTY. LTD.

Phone: 44-1353

32 Mihil Street,
PRESTON, 3072.

9th August, 1979.

Dear Shareholder, (as addressed)

The Melbourne Aviation Group Pty. Ltd., has now reached the cross-roads and our future path is uncertain.

Increased fuel prices (with more to come) plus proposed increases in air navigation charges have made private flying a most expensive activity.

The present market value of aircraft is at an all time low. Our utilisation has fallen dramatically over the last two (2) months.

We must know your future intentions. Do you wish to remain a member, or do you wish to get out? If you wish to remain what will your average monthly flying be?

The following main options are open to us -

1. Wind up completely and distribute the surplus.
2. Reduce numbers of shareholders and aircraft commensurate with proposed utilisation.
3. Reduce aircraft to two of value comparable with present fleet of three and retain existing number of shareholders.
4. Stay as we are with escalating costs and low overall utilisation.

A General Meeting is to be held to decide our future. Your views (and vote) by personal attendance or proxy is vital.

Yours faithfully,



V. COCHRANE,
Chairman.

Notification to members detailing the crisis facing MAG in the late 1970s.

(Option 3 was approved at the '79 AGM)



VH-API. Civil Aircraft Sales yard. October 1978. (Pre purchase inspection).



VH-BNW. With Philip Ball. Booking Officer (with wife Joy), 1985-90.



The MAG 'Fleet' – following the 1978/9 update.



VH-PEX panel. (1965 – PA28/180) (Note red band on tacho – 2100/2300 RPM)



VH-BNW. (1975 – PA28/151) A decade of instrument panel design change!



MAG pilots Des Walker (L), and Vic Cochrane (R), with regular passenger and defacto associate member Rod Burgess (center).

VH-BNW

1975 model. PA28/151
Purchased – Dec. 1979.
Price - \$24,000.
Time in Service – 2120 hours.
Sold in May 1992.
Price - \$46,000.
TTIS – 5320 hours.
MAG hours flown – 3200.

VH-API

1973 model. C182P.
Purchased – Oct. 1978.
Price - \$31,000.
Time in service – 960 hours
Sold in December 1991.
Price - \$51,000.
TTIS – 4300 hours.
MAG hours flown – 3340.



The flight's not over until the aircraft is parked!

Vic Cochrane, at White Cliffs (left) - feeling rather flat after taxiing over a 'dog-eared' stake – near Vic's left heel.

The Burgess family owned 30 acres of the market garden land which was acquired for the Moorabbin Airport. They had farmed the land along the northern edge of the soon to be established airport since the turn of the century. Rod recalled

with amusement the efforts of the airport groundsmen when they were installing drains along Northern Avenue, - "I know how the water drains in that paddock, the silly Buggers are trying to run the drain the wrong way!" The turn of the century house which was under the 13/31 flight path has been demolished, and the remainder of the Burgess property is now under the ersatz undulations of the new golf course along the northern side of Center Dandenong Road.

The 1980s.

Utilisation had continued to fall and at the 1980 AGM the FPC advised that pilot hours averaged only 1.25 hours per month – in the words of Bert Sabin – “An appalling figure”! Budget forecasts were reset at API/200 and BNW/250 hours per annum, but utilisation would eventually settle at 240 hours for each aircraft. The two aircraft now had a total market value of \$52,000, and with 32 shareholders the \$1.00 shares had an asset backing of \$1.75. Issue of shares to the 33/34th shareholders were approved and taken up by 1984.

The Sabin Administration.

In April 1981 following his retirement from full-time employment Bert Sabin was appointed as MAG Administrator, taking over the duties of financial planning, maintenance co-ordination, bookings, monthly accounts and share transfers. This was a stable and efficient period with progressive improvement in the financial position. Small amounts of cash reserves were able to be invested in short term deposits, providing valuable interest income to offset operating costs. This appointment continued until August '85, when Bert resigned from MAG after losing his licence when a heart condition was diagnosed.

The improved financial position enabled the IFR group levy to be abolished and the pilot's contributions repaid. With more sophisticated aircraft and more pilots operating IFR and NVMC, it was appropriate to increase the pilot liability insurance cover to \$2 million single event, with another \$500,000 Third Party Legal Liability.

With utilisation still lower than desired pilots who were on the waiting list were now given the opportunity to become Supernumerary members. This involved depositing an amount commensurate with the latest share sale price with MAG, in anticipation of shares becoming available. Super pilots were granted all flying privileges but not able to exercise voting rights until shares were purchased.

The mid-80s saw a further downturn in GA flying of around 10% over a three-year period. Aircraft on the field at MB fell 20% - first issue PPL licences were down about the same, and resignations reached 7 pilots for every 10 new licences. Following the introduction of the mandatory Biennial Flight Review many pilots were thought to have surrendered their licences. The user-pays policy resulted in charges increasing up to twice the inflation rate, and with import parity pricing and the lower \$Aust., Avgas costs rose 65% within five years.

Following the resignation of the Administrator in Aug.'84, the Board positions were once again split up amongst the Directors as shown in Appendix 2.

There were many challenges to private flying in the '80s, but it is notable that despite the introduction of GAIT charges, the Avgas levy to fund the (then) CAA, plus the capital expenses of mandatory purchase of transponder and encoders, the Company situation remained sound. Pilot hours though not evenly spread were maintained, albeit at a level below the optimum 20 hours per year. Both aircraft flew many missions, in particular the Skylane with its four-place capability and 'long-leg' endurance, making it a popular inter-capital and outback cruise aircraft.

VH-API



(Top), Merv Read checks the fuel in API at Rosevale Station (Center) Birdsville in the Rain (Bottom), Innamincka Strip. (Rod Burgess, John Argall, Philip Ball.)

Travels with API – Stories from the '80s.



Around OZ in 28 days – (May '83)
(Rod Burgess, John Argall, Vic Cochrane, and Bert Tinning.)

Many pilots cherish the desire to fly around Australia, and this wish was fulfilled in 1983 for Vic Cochrane, Bert Tinning and John Argall, along with experienced MAG passenger and former owner of pre-airport paddocks Rod Burgess. This trip was typical of many flown by API during its 13 years of on-line service with MAG. The Cessna performed faultlessly over the clockwise flown pattern, as this account from John Argall ¹recalls.

“While API was being refuelled at Ceduna at the start of the Western leg, I wandered in to have a yarn with the Flight Service operator. Now most of us have fond memories of these guys, but every now and then you struck an officious one. So it was with some caution that I answered “No” when he enquired whether I had checked the strip condition at Nullabor Homestead. Nobody used that rough strip – they all landed on the sealed North/South road, which ran from the Motel on the Eyre Highway back to the Homestead. Without a change of expression he slid the phone across the desk. Jamming the receiver into my ear I asked the girl at Motel reception a fictitious question about the strip condition. She replied as expected – “Everyone uses the road”. I made a vague appropriate reply about overflying, handed the phone back and bid farewell. Never did get a ‘225’, guess that he was just

¹ John Argall commenced his flying training in 1971 at Parafield in a Victa Airtourer with the SA AeroClub, and later at MB with PipeAir and Civil with the ubiquitous PA28 Cherokee. He joined MAG in June '75, was appointed to the Board in Nov '79, and has been Chairman since Feb '84.



Vic struggles for relief – with a ‘Piddle-Pak’.

The old natural white gravel surface strip on the Northern edge of Ayers Rock had an alignment of 11/29, and an operating length of 1218 metres at an elevation of 1686 feet. It was always a popular destination for ‘lighties’, and apart from busy School holiday periods when a rickety wooden tower was sometimes erected and Primary Control Zone procedures established, was normally completely unregulated. The usual technique when the area was uncontrolled was to overfly the Rock for photos in any pattern that took your fancy, then make a low-level window rattling ‘go-around’ pass over the motels on the Eastern side of the Rock. By the time you were tied down a car was waiting for the pickup. With the establishment of the Uluru National Park and handover of the title in October 1985 to the Pitjinjatjara people, the strip was closed, the few buildings demolished and the area allowed to re-vegetate.

David Hill¹ remembers operating from the old strip in API, and feels that this anecdote demonstrates “how easy it is to become very close to being part of the historical record”.

“A shimmery, stinking hot afternoon found me, API and the family lining up on the old Ayers Rock strip. We were number two to a DC3. Some thought had been given to this takeoff, it being my first in conditions where density altitude needed to be considered. My flying prior to then had been either in Southern New Zealand or around Moorabbin.

The cabin was stacked with family and holiday paraphernalia with just enough in the tanks to reach Alice with reserves intact. I observed the DC3

¹ Well known Melbourne Veterinarian David Hill joined MAG in Jan.’79. He learned to fly in New Zealand around ‘69/70, and in the tradition of the TV documentary series the “Flying Vet”, remembers making many Vet calls in a Jodel D11!

rotate adjacent to the tin shed and decided that if API was not airborne by the time I passed the shed, then we should abort. Power up against the brakes, feet on the floor and away we go, with me holding her down until she reaches a good flying speed margin and aiming for a clean and positive rotation and lift-off.

Rotate? – Boy did we rotate! With the tail abruptly diving toward the ground and the nose leaping skywards API demanded and received full attention. The tin shed flashed by obligating takeoff. It was a case of holding the nose level and the tap full open.

We roared over the boundary fence much lower than planned and scrambled skywards. Checks on climb out seemed all OK and a careful mental revision of the pre-flight suggested nothing amiss. During the mandatory photo circuit of the rock some minor control difficulties were easily rationalised by the DC3's wake and the turbulence generated by the rock itself.

All the way to Alice I struggled to properly trim the aircraft as it merrily porpoised its way across the sky. Alice saw us land safely after a demanding approach. While securing the plane I tried to decide whether to seek out a LAME, a CFI or a Met man to discuss my experience. None was needed; as soon became clear.

The children who full well knew Dad's opinion of rock collecting with aeroplanes had decided to hide their private half-hundredweight kit-set of Ayers Rock right down the very back of the aircraft where Dad was less likely to find it.

Despite doing what I believed was an adequate and proper pre-flight; I'd been flying my family right on the rear edge of the balance envelope! As well the fuel burn would have been nudging us further and further into the unstable zone. Never again have I presumed that a bag that weighed 1kg at the start of the trip weighed the same on the final leg”.

Merv Read¹ relates another story with API as he recalls his first MAG trip and his affection for the Skylane - a typical experience in pre-GPS days.

“With a trip planned to the Birdsville races and Alice, and with 280 hours under my belt I figured that I knew it all – even what you called the Department in those days. It's hard to get lost in Victoria up to Mildura, then it's straight up the highway to Broken Hill – no problems. Our next leg was also an easy run up to Tibooburra, and after a quick look at the rude paintings by Clifton Pugh in the Pub, we set off for Innamincka – across the featureless Sturt Stony Desert. As we approached our ETA I asked the other pair of eyes in the front to maintain a sharp lookout, only to find him soon fast asleep – and our destination missed. We were obviously off track, and I muttered the pilot's rudest four letter word – LOST!!

¹ Merv Read joined MAG in Feb.'81 after training at Combined Flight Training (CFT) with Garth Harris. Being domiciled in Dingley close to the airport he was co-opted to the onerous position of maintenance director when he was elected to the Board in 1985.

Deciding to fly in increasing orbits, I soon sighted a hut on a strip, which I assumed must be Innamincka. After a precautionary look I put API down – and cut a lot of grass! A guy smelling strongly of liquor staggered out of the hut and after a suitable interrogation advised us that Innamincka was “up the river” - we were on a Nappa Merri outstation. They must have had a lot of rain as getting off I cut a lot more grass, only just making it by the end of the strip with the stall warning honking in protest. My thanks to the Skylane – what a mighty machine. We flew up the river, sighted more tin sheds and this time landed on the right strip.

Finding Birdsville with the NDB was easy, and after the races we had no problems to Alice – apart from requesting my clearance at what I thought was Santa Teresa, and only minutes later sighting a long sealed strip with a B52 parked on it. The penny dropped and seconds later I reported downwind – API must hold the record for the 30 mile dash at Alice! The Skylane had none of the ‘Bells and Whistles’ of our later models, not even DMEA, but we managed to come home with GPS-like precision. The main reason was that I had promoted another passenger to the co-pilot seat – this one stayed awake and kept his finger firmly planted on my WAC chart line. I had learnt my lesson, never assume that winds in that part of the world are 120/20, and when flying outback an exact position check must be kept.

Back at Moorabbin I quickly cleaned API up, had Bert Sabin (Col.Ret.) seen her with the green grass prop it would have been packdrill in full kit for me. This was the start of a great love affair for me – API was a Lady – but a Lady of a different kind. She was forgiving!”

MELBOURNE AVIATION GROUP PTY. LTD.

Recently, some 25 members (shareholders) and ladies celebrated with a dinner, 20 years of successful operations.

To the best of our knowledge we were the first to operate on a group ownership basis as a private company. We are certainly the oldest organisation of our kind in Australia.

Incorporated on 13th December, 1963, we commenced to operate with our pride and joy, VH-KBI – an Auster Aiglet – under the following charter:-

“To provide shareholders with the BEST aircraft at the LOWEST cost”.

Our register of shareholders now contains 34 names (the original was 5) and we own 2 aircraft, both in Limited IFR, namely:-

VH-API	Cessna 182P
VH-BNW	Piper Warrior

Only 2 planes for 34 pilots, do I hear you say?

Yes, and very rarely do we have difficulty with bookings.

We did have 3 planes a few years ago – too many!

Our costs are divided into 2 components:-

FIXED – Insurance, Air Nav Charges, Radio Licence, General Expenses, etc.

FLYING – Fuel, Maintenance, Overhauls, etc.

The fixed costs are met by a monthly subscription of \$22 per member.

Our present flying rates, per tacho hour, are \$47 and \$34 respectively.

This arrangement of splitting costs ensures viability even with no utilisation!

Each shareholder has 1,000 fully paid shares of \$1.00 par value giving a paid up capital of \$34,000. Shares are transferred in the normal way, the present selling price being about \$1.25 per share.

Shareholders must hold at least a PPL.

One of our members does all the administration, bookings, maintenance co-ordination, pilot approved maintenance, etc. All other appointments are honorary including the Board of Directors.

I could write a lot more about our rules, etc., but feel it is sufficient to say:-

“Twenty years of successful operations speak for themselves.”

“Twenty years of successful operations speaks for itself.”

H.L. Sabin, Administrator,
3 Gladwyn Avenue, Bentleigh East, Vic. 3165

With more than two decades of continuous Moorabbin airport operations since the formation of the Group in 1963, the shareholder pilots of MAG gathered to celebrate the ongoing success of the Company – as Bert Sabin’s letter to the AOPA magazine in early 1984 attests.



A Celebratory Anniversary Poster – 1983.



API on the old Ayers Rock strip. (Photo Merv Read)

The late 1980s.

When the Company administration reverted back to the Board in 1985 MAG had an operating surplus of \$12775. Though this on the surface indicated that the Group had operated profitably on a short-term basis, the Board decided that rates should reflect the true cost of operations. This meant that accrued obligations representing future maintenance liabilities should be progressively covered, rather than the past practice of calling up funds by levies or share issue when needed. This required all scheduled overhauls to be more accurately estimated and prorata amounts set aside as each hour was flown out of the component TBO life. It was time for MAG to move into the computer age – and the Financial Administrator, Ian Latham, undertook this task.

With the help of computer software Ian established a detailed system of cost analysis which showed progressively whether levies and flying charges were adequate to meet current operating costs and forward budget estimates. His work in this area would provide the Group with very accurate operational data, enabling the progressive build-up of cash reserves, and by the early 1990s the elimination of any budget deficits. It spelt the end of the crystal ball analysis and ‘Guesstimation’ budgeting! Despite some rises flying rates continued to be more that competitive with School hire charges, and the cash surplus improved. However, even in the 85/86 year when cash on hand figures had risen into the \$20,000 range, a deficit showing a reserve cash shortfall against future engine/prop overhauls, major inspections etc., was still being recorded.

The late ‘80s were also characterised by increasing maintenance costs on both aircraft as they entered their ‘mid-life crisis’ stage, making it advisable for respraying and upholstery refurbishing programmes to be carried out. As aircraft availability was still not a problem another two shareholders were approved in ‘88, the Group now numbering 36 shareholders, plus two supernumerary pilots.

In 1990 following a questionnaire the motion “That the Board pursue the orderly replacement of the aircraft” was carried at the AGM. To finance the purchase of later model more costly aircraft another 300 shares were issued at the current asset backing value of \$3.20 each. As had happened on previous occasions, some shareholders who were satisfied with the current fleet and their level of financial investment sold their shares. In the tradition established by pilots long before the current fashion for personalised car number plates - (W.G.Parsfield for the Comanche WGP and Alan Pilgrim for the Cessna API) - the Skylane was shortly after sold -- to Albert Poon in Tasmania for \$51,000. API had flown 3340 hours with MAG averaging 250/260 hours per year during its 13 years of service.

In May ‘92 the Warrior BNW was sold to Kyneton Aero Club for \$46,000 and a search for a replacement begun. BNW had flown 3200 hours for MAG when sold at 5320 TTIS, an average like the Cessna of around 250 hours each year.

During their period of online service neither aircraft suffered any major damage – the re-skinning of a wing panel on BNW being the worst incident – and with their sale a safe, stable and progressive period for MAG had come to an end.

When completing the ferry delivery flight to Tasmania Cessna lover and Maintenance Director Merv Read planted a farewell kiss on the spinner – an appropriate gesture for her years of sound and safe service. It was sad to see her upside-down with a broken back in April 1996, after a landing mishap in Tasmania.



Vic Cochrane

Vic certainly loved his flying - having enjoyed a good introduction to flying when learning his airborne skills with the well known and respected Roy Goon at Royal Victorian Aero Club at Moorabbin airfield.

In those halcyon days in the middle '60s when private flying seemed to be so much cheaper, (before the price of Avgas made you think twice about the cost of every minute the engine was running), Vic, with fellow MAG pilot Bob Smith, gained a lot of free hours as an unpaid ferry pilot for the late Fred Blake, picking up and delivering aircraft Fred had bought or sold through his dealership.

Now it takes a certain kind of courage or 'devil may care' attitude to arrive at a strange airfield, climb into an unfamiliar Piper-Cessna-Beech or whatever - possibly with a donk nearly out of hours or with an airframe showing all the weariness of a tired old school hack - and then fire her up and leap into the sky. But he managed to survive all these excursions, often receiving accolades from other VFR pilots for "Getting her back in such lousy weather"!

He fought a long battle with cancer, having had regular chemotherapy treatment during the '70s. Even though this produced a bladder endurance much shorter than that of most light aircraft - and isn't this a problem even for those of us with Tarzan-like sphincter muscle control - he managed to 'relieve' himself of this problem via the agency of a one litre plastic fruit juice bottle - pushed firmly down against the rear seat cushion. Not an easy feat during a bumpy flight when

some of the aircraft's gyrations were not always the result of the prevailing weather conditions!



Vic Cochrane at the controls of API.

Vic joined MAG in 1966 and served as Chairman from 1972 to 1983. He was 'In Command' during a difficult inflationary period when MAG was required to move from an ad hoc reactive style of financial planning – adequate for basic VFR aircraft with few aids – to IFR aircraft equipped with more costly to buy and maintain 'Toys' which required careful forward budgeting. This was a decade when MAG lost its adolescent innocence and matured as a competent and soundly run flying group.

Vic was a man of the land – a market gardener whose family owned land and grew vegies on blocks in the Moorabbin airport district. Thick set build, easy country walk, relaxed Aussie style of speech, hands showing all the signs of years of work in the soil – yet he had a fine touch at the controls of an aircraft. Strictly VFR, he would show his confidence in the pilot by snoozing in the back on IMC legs. Happiest when cruising along VFR OCTA with finger firmly planted on the WAC chart line, he could count 'numerous sandunes' and navigate accurately on outback legs using only the 'Mark 1' eyeball.

After an IFR leg out of Moorabbin, Vic came up front for the next leg out of Parafield. Nipping out via Outer Harbour, he settled API in cruise OCTA coastal. Just past Dublin the radio barked – "Red Cessna, turn right immediately to clear active Military firing zone!" Vic's reaction was characteristic - smoothly executing a turn until clear of the Restricted Zone, (now R295A – SFC to FL250!), he remarked to all on board – "Geez, I don't know how we can defend this bloody Country, the Bastards couldn't even shoot us down".

Vic left MAG in 1990, and lost his long battle with cancer in November 1993.

The Early 1990s – Aircraft changes.

After the sale of API a replacement Cessna Skylane was purchased in Feb.'92 from Ian Bailey at Moorabbin for \$105,000. VH-XTK was a 1982 model and had only 720 hours total time. The aircraft was upgraded to IFR category with the installation of KY96A Com, MKRS, four-place intercom and strobes. As late model Warrior 11 Pipers were hard to find – most having high school utilisation and suffering from ‘touch and go-itis’ – the best choice to replace BNW was an Archer 11, a PA28/181. In July '92, a privately owned aircraft was located at Bankstown, and an offer to purchase subject to inspection was made through the agency of the late Fred Blake. As this aircraft was also being sought by a Bankstown based flying group, John Argall and John Riley¹ flew XTK up to undertake the inspection. On arrival at the field, the duo found the aircraft locked in a hangar, and nobody seemed to have a key to gain access! After some telephone calls a key was located cross-town in Sydney, and finally by late afternoon the Archer could be viewed. This was not the end of what was realised to be a scheme to frustrate all attempts to purchase, as all documentation - logbooks, 100 hourly maintenance release etc. – were also not on site and locked away mysteriously for the weekend. Unfortunately for the unknown conspirators, John Riley was to remain in Sydney for several days, and was thus able to complete all financial and mechanical checks. VH-NBE was finally acquired by MAG and flown to Moorabbin by John Riley in the middle of the next week. Purchase price was \$74,000 with a TTIS of only 835 hours. Well equipped in IFR category, it gave MAG pilots a true four place aircraft with 125 kts cruise and good touring range as an alternative to the Skylane, but also available as an excellent IFR trainer or for just ‘round the patch’ flying.

As most of the cash reserves had been used up in the purchase of the Cessna, a bridging loan from the Directors was needed to quickly complete the purchase of the Archer. This blew the deficit figure out temporarily to a massive \$39,000! Issue of the last of the 50,000 authorised shares at a cost of \$300 per member, and the taking up of new share issues by the two supers raised some of the capital, but an unrecovered changeover cost of around \$27,000 presented a major problem. Membership now totalled 38 pilots, with utilisation figures around 240 hours/annum per aircraft seeming to be a permanent feature of the Group. As there were pilots waiting to join MAG, another two supers were accepted. This brought the pilot base to 40, a ratio of 20 pilots per aircraft, (the same as the original number with KBI in 1963) – but without the need for a mandatory requirement of 20 hours per pilot per annum.

To eliminate this deficit and rebuild the reserves a five-year budget strategy involving a loading on the levy was instigated. With careful planning and monitoring of operating costs the deficit was eliminated by mid '95, two years ahead of schedule, and a genuine operating cash surplus achieved. For the first time since the establishment of the Melbourne Aviation Group, the Company not only owned the Group assets wholly, but also had excess cash reserves over those needed to meet all forecast expenses.

¹ John Riley joined MAG in May '84 after training with GroupAir at Berwick under the renowned Bill Campbell-Hicks. He was appointed to the Board in Nov. '86. John holds a B.Com (Melb.), and a Masters Degree in Taxation Law, (Melb.) As a registered Tax Agent and member ASCPA, he has been responsible for Group taxation strategies and Company Returns.



(Top) VH-XTK in Bailey's yard. Feb. '92 TTIS 720 hours. \$105,000
 (Bottom) XTK on Arkaroola strip April '92 (l-r) John Argall, John Riley, Ian Latham. (Resort driver)

(Top) VH-NBE on line. July '92. TTIS 835 hours. \$74,000.
 (Bottom) XTK/NBE flyaway to WhiteCliffs. Nov. '92. (L-R) John Riley, John Argall, Harold & Elizabeth Scanlon, Patricia and (The Late) Scott McLean, Jim Roberts.

Loss of VH-XTK.

Scott McLean made a late booking for the 10th and 11th October 1995. He advised the Booking Officer that he would probably stay overnight at Warrnambool on the 10th, after completion of his business activities that day.

Scott left his Mt Eliza home early in the morning and took off from Moorabbin airport shortly after 0800 EST. The first leg in XTK was to Melbourne airport where two colleagues from interstate RPT flights were boarded.

He flew XTK to Warrnambool airport and spent the day conducting Company activities. Late in the day he rang his wife indicating that he did not think a return to Moorabbin would be possible that evening. A change in plans obviously occurred as Scott telephoned Briefing around 7.30PM to check weather details in the Melbourne area. Perhaps the wish to enable his interstate colleagues to catch a flight from Tullamarine that night persuaded him to undertake a NVFR return. Scott had completed his night rating the previous year, and though of limited experience was current.

The conditions that night were dark and moonless, with a front and associated trough approaching Warrnambool. Though the conditions at Melbourne and Moorabbin were suitable for a night VFR return with a high overcast, reports in the Warrnambool area indicated some low cloud and drizzle patches ahead of the front.

After takeoff from RWY 31 the aircraft was observed flying low in a south-easterly direction in a level attitude, back towards the runway. The aircraft then dropped the left wing and descended into the ground. It was destroyed on impact near the 31/04 intersection. All on board perished.

The BASI report indicated that there was no defect found in the aircraft wreckage which would have contributed to the accident. Whilst the reason for the crash could not be determined, the report suggested that pilot fatigue, pilot incapacity or pilot disorientation due to loss of visual reference were the most likely contributing factors.

The Coroner's report which was handed down in November 1997 commented on the changing weather conditions, Scott's health and his limited night flying experience. As the autopsy showed ischaemic heart disease of the left coronary artery he was unable to determine whether Scott had suffered a coronary attack which may have resulted in loss of control whilst attempting to return to land.

Vale Scott McLean.



Herald Sun, Thursday, November 27, 1997



Inexperience: three people died in this crash.

Coroner queries training

A CORONER has called for a review of training procedures after finding a pilot's inexperience led to a plane crash that killed three businessmen.

State Coroner Graeme Johnstone found pilot Scott MacLean, 53, had never taken off at night and did not have sufficient experience for the night flight from Melbourne to Warrnambool in which he and two business partners died.

Mr Johnstone raised concerns about the training needed for the pilot to qualify for a night VFR or visual flight rules rating.

He recommended the Civil Aviation Authority and Bureau of Air Safety review night VFR training and licensing.

Mr MacLean and business partners Roger Bell, 42, and Donald Ledema, 50, died instantly when their single-engine Cessna went into a spiral and crashed at Warrnambool airport on October 10, 1995.

The trio from Aquafield McCracken, a company dealing in irrigation, were bound for Melbourne.

Their plane took off from Warrnambool airport at 7.50pm, ahead of a developing storm with low cloud and drizzle.

"With insufficient night flight experience com-

By TIM STONEY

bined with low cloud, changeable weather conditions and a lack of familiarity with the aerodrome, a recipe for disaster was in the making," Mr Johnstone said.

"There is also the possibility that the pilot panicked, froze or became disoriented as a result of the situation that faced him on the night."

According to a witness, the plane disappeared into low cloud before circling back over the runway and diving sharply into the ground.

Mr Johnstone said he could not make a clear assessment of whether the pilot contributed to the three men's deaths.

He found Mr MacLean had a family history of heart disease and might have had a heart attack caused by the stress of flying in unfamiliar conditions.

Mr Johnstone also raised questions about whether Mr MacLean, the holder of a private pilot's licence, should have been flying business partners for commercial purposes.

He recommended the CAA improve identification of risk factors for private pilots, review VFR requirements, highlight the dangers of night flights and review issues of private pilots flying for work.

Newspaper report of Coroner's finding – November 1997.

(The statement that Scott had never taken off at night is inaccurate reporting)

Replacement Skylane search.

The loss of Scott and his passengers cast a pall of sadness at the AGM held just 10 days later. A damaged aircraft can be repaired and a destroyed one replaced, but nothing can compensate for the loss of a friend and associate. Naturally queries were raised regarding Company rules covering bookings and pilot recency, whether NVFR flights should be permitted, and if flights for business purposes encouraged 'Get home-itis'.

Had XTK returned safely to Moorabbin it would have soon required a 100 hourly service, the last service before the engine overhaul due at 1800 hours. As the insured value of the aircraft was not discounted for the hours burnt out of the engine life, (and logically the market value of the aircraft reduced), the full insured sum of \$110,000 was paid by AAUP to the Group.

Cessna had ceased production of single engine light aircraft in 1986, and with some minor changes the C182R was the last model. To find a replacement was to prove very difficult as they were 'as scarce as hen's teeth'. Pilots who owned late model Skylanes cherished them and wanted to hold on to them. Cessna had just announced that they were to resume production of single engine models, but as the expected new price was to be in excess of \$300,000, the asking price for the last of the 1980s used models was likely to exceed the MAG limit.

Advertisements were placed in flying magazines by Merv Read who also contacted Dealers seeking a low hours C182R aircraft. Director and Booking Officer Chris Johnson¹ wrote to all of the 39 owners of 'R' model Skylanes on the register seeking a suitable aircraft, initially with minimal response to the enquiries.

Persistence was eventually rewarded when a 1982 Skylane was located in Brisbane. One owner since new, the aircraft was superbly equipped in IFR category with, in addition to the usual Cessna avionics, S-Tec altitude hold, Trimble 2000A GPS, 2nd ADF, Stormscope, ELT, intercom and strobes. Time in service at sale was 2200 hours, with 1500 engine hours to overhaul. This Cessna was the ideal choice for a top-of-the-line Company aircraft. Purchase was effected at \$125,000, and the aircraft ferried to Moorabbin by John Riley and Merv Read and placed on line in Feb. '96.

The ferry flight was notable as the engine was just out of the shop having undergone a complete warranty re-build. This involved a complete replacement of all the pistons, rings and barrels on the Continental engine, following low compression problems with the changeover engine installed at 1500 hours. It was with some trepidation that John and Merv, facing a flight into IMC conditions after take off, ran the engine checks.

¹ Chris Johnson became interested in flying during his service in the Australian Regular Army from 1966-72. During his posting to the Parachute Training Flight at Williamstown NSW, his big regret is that he did not manage to "swing a ride" in any of the Vampires, Sabres or Mirages. Back in civvy street, after a flight in a C172 he became convinced that flying was much more sensible than leaping out of a perfectly serviceable aircraft. He commenced his training at Moorabbin in 1978, joined MAG in 1981, and was elected to the Board in 1991. He and his wife Uschi currently handle the Booking co-ordination. Chris also enjoys flying low and slow, and owns a 1946 Aeronca 7AC Champ, VH-EPZ.

Merv does not have a love of IFR flying, being of the view that should the weather go out you land at the nearest suitable town, find a motel, have a great meal with a bottle of red, plonk down 'the plastic' next morning and come home - hopefully in 8/8ths blue. The prospect of boring holes in solid cloud with an untested donk for several hours was enough to test the resolve of any IFR pilot, but Merv resisted the temptation to hop on a return commercial flight and, no doubt muttering incantations to whichever Deity he speaks to at these moments, stayed aboard.

After around 30 minutes they felt that all had checked out satisfactorily, and during the six hour flight to Moorabbin the engine performed faultlessly. This sustained initial period of flight honed the bore and settled in the rings, giving the engine a superb compression and low oil consumption.

John Riley relates the negotiations which led to a long and difficult flight:

Ferrying BJZ to Moorabbin.

"After the loss of Cessna 182R VH-XTK at Warrnambool in October 1995 steps were put in place to seek out a replacement aircraft. Credit for locating VH-BJZ goes to Chris Johnson who had obtained a list of all the registered owners of C182R Skylanes flying in Australia. Although the first approach to the owners of VH-BJZ, (a Brisbane Engineering Company), yielded no result, a chance comment from a Brisbane aircraft dealer to Chris in January 1996 identified the aircraft as one that might possibly be for sale. The owners had acquired a Beech Baron and needed to sell the C182, but the aircraft was not serviceable at that time.

A "factory new" engine had been fitted to the aircraft at about 1700 hours total time, but had become unserviceable due to a loss of compression. A "debate" between the owners and Continental Engines about who was going to pay the cost of rectification then ensued. At the time of MAG becoming aware of the aircraft the dispute appeared to heading towards a compromise. After a visit to Brisbane by Chris and myself and following a detailed inspection, an offer to purchase the aircraft for \$125,000 (the owners having asked for \$130,000) was made on the understanding that the engine would be restored and signed off before MAG would accept delivery.

Several weeks passed from the date of the first inspection before we finally received the news that Continental had supplied 6 new cylinder kits and that they would be fitted immediately upon arrival in Australia.

After many calls to the engineers in Brisbane it was finally agreed that they would have the aircraft engine reassembled and tested by mid February. Arrangements were then made to travel to Brisbane on February 16th for the final inspection and acceptance of the aircraft. As Chris was unfortunately unable to make the trip to Brisbane for the final inspection and acceptance Merv Reid and I left on an early morning 'Big-Iron' flight up to Brisbane.

On arrival at Archerfield the first task was to ensure that the aircraft had been restored to service. It didn't take long to find out that all was not as we had been lead to expect. The engine had been reassembled and test run, but the

aircraft had not been test flown. In addition the avionics technician was still to complete the radio inspection to enable the aircraft to operate in IFR.

Assurances were obtained from the engineers that the engine was serviceable, and the avionics technician was summoned to complete his inspections. As the aircraft had been subject to a mortgage to the ANZ Bank, the bank was contacted and arrangements made to transfer the balance of the funds due on the purchase. The transfer was organised by Ian Latham very quickly and the bank was soon able to advise the owners that the aircraft could be released.

With the paper work all sorted out all that remained was to simply fill the tanks and fly it back to Moorabbin! If it had only been that simple - firstly the weather was solidly IFR for the first 300NM, and whilst the aircraft had been signed off as fit for flight, it had not been flown for more than 5 months - and the engine had been subject to major surgery!

The first attempt to start the aircraft failed - the battery was flat and the start cart had to be summoned. The second attempt was much better and it was off to the run up bay. The first run up indicated fouled plugs, but this was soon cleared. Then to the holding point for 28L - it took some finding but was finally sighted. A further run up was conducted and then it was time to head for home.

Acceleration during the take off run was steady rather than rapid, but with 75 knots on the ASI the aircraft rotated and climbed away. Climb was accomplished at 95 - 100 knots at full throttle and full rich mixture with the cowl flaps wide open. Temperatures were on the high side but stabilised at about 3/4 scale - still in the green.

To minimise the any confusion the GPS was turned off and navigation limited to the VOR and ADF. The autopilot was also left off and the aircraft was hand flown in IMC. After reaching the planned altitude of 8000' the aircraft was run at full power with the mixture rich and the cowl flaps half open to keep the temperatures at acceptable levels. The use of high power settings was to ensure that the rings in the new cylinders were properly bedded in, but the combination of high power and the friction of the new rings produced plenty of heat.

The journey had been planned in 2 legs, Archerfield to Dubbo, and then Dubbo to Moorabbin. The first 300 NM of the leg to Dubbo was in IMC but after that the weather was kind. The aircraft was refuelled at Dubbo and, as was expected the fuel consumption had been high, but notwithstanding the new cylinders and the high power setting the oil consumption was not excessive.

The leg to Moorabbin was uneventful and the night arrival capped off a very successful, but long and tiring day".

John Riley.



Page 70 photos

(Top) VH-BJZ - engine warranty rebuild at Archerfield. January 1996.

(Middle) - The Skylane Office'. (Lower) - The new line-up. BJZ and NBE.

The Mid-90s.

The excellent cash flow and budget surplus created the possibility that the Company may for the first time face a taxable income. In previous years any profit could be offset against accumulated losses carried forward from the preceding years operations. These losses had represented the depreciation amounts charged against the aircraft, and as MAG rates had never included provision for future aircraft replacement, showed up on Company balance sheets as trading losses. When setting the rates for the 95/96 year the Board was looking at a situation which would have been the envy of many Companies. MAG owned two late model aircraft and had substantial cash reserves well in excess of forecast budget needs.

Prior to the crash of XTK and in ignorance of the traumatic event to follow, flying rates had been reduced by 6.5%, and the levy by up to 28%. As all of the 50,000 shares had been issued, the levy loading of the previous years had in fact been in lieu of a capital injection needed to finance the purchase of XTK and NBE.

A paper presented by Director and Company Accountant John Riley analysed the financial situation and queried the replacement cycle suitable for the Group. The critical question was whether to replace the aircraft when maintenance became excessive, or capriciously on an opportunity basis depending on the market, after a nominated time such as half-life engine, or at a given total time in service. His paper proposed that the additional funds for aircraft replacement be raised sooner rather than later in the aircraft ownership period.

The authorised capital was increased to \$1 million, but rather than impose an additional impost on member's levies, an allocation of 150 shares at a premium of \$3.00 per share was made on 01/01/97. These shares were paid from the levy contributions, raising additional capital and at the same time reducing the taxable income of the Company for that financial year.

After a meeting with AAUP representatives early in 1996 to discuss the loss of XTK, the Company hull insurance premium was increased from 2.75% to 3.25%. To cover the higher value of the replacement Cessna, and an increase in pilot liability cover from \$2 million to \$3 million, an increase in the levy was needed. This wiped out the earlier reductions made in late '95. Insurance premium costs of over \$10,000 per annum now made up the largest fixed cost and needed an individual member contribution of over \$23 per month.

Early in 1998 an Accounts Officer position was created to reduce the excessive workload which had been carried since 1985 by the (retiring) Financial Director Ian Latham. During his dedicated period of office Ian had kept the Group in such excellent financial health that an increase in the value of MAG assets to over \$250,000 - and a share price rise from \$2500 to around \$6500 had been assured.

As has proved to be the case since the formation of MAG in 1963, the ongoing success and stability of the Group has been due to the unflagging efforts of pilots such as Ian, whose legacy of sound financial management will continue to benefit and be enjoyed by all Company shareholders.

No doubt there will be many as yet unforeseen problems to be faced by the Company over the coming years. But provided the shareholders of MAG recognise the benefits of shared ownership, then Australia's oldest private flying group can look forward to continued viability and successful operations over another three decades and beyond.

MAG – Looking beyond 2000.

When Tom Purvis wrote his article for the March 1964 issue of the Australian Flying Magazine, he envisaged the construction of a Group clubhouse and the move to “a less busy field”. No doubt had he lived he would have adjusted to the changes over the years in General Aviation private flying and the development of Moorabbin into a busy secondary airport. Whether Moorabbin remains as the main flying training location in Melbourne, or becomes an intrastate and interstate commuter base depends largely on the possible closure of Essendon airport, and the outcome of the recent sale of all of the FAC airports to private interests. It may also be that with the abandonment of the Avgas fuel levy in favour of location specific landing/movement charges at the formerly FAC airports, plus new enroute IFR and Met charges, that private operations from Moorabbin will become prohibitive. Should this prove to be the case, Tom's dream of a MAG clubhouse on a field devoted to sport flying may become a reality!

With the fleet rebuilt once again the question of length of aircraft ownership is relevant. Should the Group expect to operate these aircraft for another 12-13 years, as was the case in the 1980s with API and BNW? Perhaps a loading should be built into the levy to ensure that capital is always being built up for the inevitable day of replacement.

What is the ideal ratio of pilots to aircraft? In the current economic climate 20/1 is not too high. But if increased pilot utilisation resulted in booking frustration, should a third aircraft once again be placed on line and more members sought? If to stand still were really to go backwards, then increasing the Company size would seem the way to go. But as MAG has survived since 1963 for the most part on unpaid shareholder efforts, it is doubtful if a larger group could operate without handing over some administrative control to an on-field flying organisation. Would this negate the original concept of the founders of MAG? That ethos based on individual pilot responsibility combined with a shared control of jointly owned assets – a structure that has stood the Company in good stead thus far.

Whatever the future, Melbourne Aviation Group has since 1963 provided many pilots with the opportunity to fly and enjoy the experience of aircraft ownership and operation, and always fulfilled its charter to provide to shareholders –

“The Best Aircraft at the Lowest Cost!”

John Argall - 1998.

Whatever happened to ?

Those old and bold pilots of MAG!



- Doug Williams. Retired April '96 from Broadmeadows College TAFE. Now CFI at Civil Aviation Academy, Essendon. Co-ordinator C-47B restoration project. (VH-TMO).
- Stan Tayler. Retired after 16000 hours. Deceased September 2000 – aged 65.
- Bill Scorse. Lives under 17/35 MB flight path. Has licence - not flying.
- Bert Fenton. Still flying in his mid-80's! Occasional aerobatics!
- Keith Hatfield. Retired since closure of Casey airfield. Actively involved in Point Cook Flying Club where he hangars Leopard Moth, VH-UUL.
- Bert Sabin. Now in his mid 80's. Not flying due heart'left branch bundle block'.
- Roger Barnes. Chief Pilot Southern Aust Airlines, Townsville.
- Rob Barnes. Assoc. Airlines Captain flying Challenger 601 at Essendon.
- John Pilkington. Retired from Dept. Not flying. Lives Dromana, Vic.
- Dennis Newman. Retired – not flying. Lives Mentone, Vic.
- Colin Munro. Not Flying. Lives Mornington Peninsula.
- Bob Smith. Retired from Westpac. Flying at Rutherford, Newcastle.
- Bert Tinning. Retired. Flies 'Folke' VW powered glider at Benalla.
- Bob Gray. Retired from Department. Not currently flying.
- Russ Pascoe. Flying with Air India out of Bombay. (Airbus 300).
- Jim More. Retired from Qantas Engineering. Flies out of Essendon.

Whatever happened to?

Those old and trusted flying machines:

- KBI. Restored in 1996 by Alan Chappelow at Sale to original silver/blue at a cost of \$10,000. Sold to Jeff Gorham for \$33,000. Hangared at 'Boorawa' near Yass/Young, NSW. TTIS around 4000 hours.
- KLJ. Forced landing accident March '93 in Northern Territory with substantial damage. Believed due to fuel exhaustion.
- WGP. Total loss at Inglewood, Vic in July 1978. Four fatalities.
- MOJ. Re-registered as WLK. (Warren L. Kirkup.) Hangared at Leeton, NSW. Fitted with 150 HP engine. (Now 115/A2). TTIS over 4800 hours.
- PEI. Sold Aug.'96 by former MAG pilot Phil Dear after 16 years ownership. Now flying out of Archerfield. TTIS over 5800 hours.
- PEX. Last seen parked at Cooktown re-sprayed – but with same old interior and avionics. Owners - Carley Family Trust, Longreach.
- API. Landing accident in Tasmania, April'96. Struck off Register.
- BNW. Flying with Kyneton Aero Club, Vic. New 160 HP engine fitted.
- XTK. Total loss at Warrnambool, Vic in October '95. Three fatalities.

Foundation Pilot's Reunion – 14/09/96.



(Above left) Keith Hatfield (L) with Bert Fenton (R).

(Above right) Bert Tinning, (L) with Doug Williams (R).



(Lower L-R) Colin Munro, Dennis Newman and Bill Score.



(Clockwise from top left) Harold Scanlon with Bert Sabin. (Keith Hatfield and John Argall at rear) - Bill Scorse, Jim More and Bert Fenton. – VH-KBI restoration (1996). – Bob Smith checks out the latest MAG aircraft (1997).

M.A.G. Board. – 2001

John Argall.	(June '75)	Chairman/Flying accounts.
John Riley.	(May '84)	Deputy Chairman/Accountant.
Akshay Bansal.	(May '88)	Financial Administration.
Merv Read.	(Feb '81)	Maintenance.
Gerry Cahir	(Nov '97)	Booking Co-ordinator
Bill Holmes.	(May '91)	Flight Standards/Currency

MAG Shareholders – 2001.

Wal Adamson	(Nov '83)	Lindsay Patone	(June '86)
Robert Barrow	(Nov '98)	Brian Quinn	(Oct '97)
Jon Davison	(Sep '00)	Jill Reason	(July '92)
Peter Drew	(Oct '91)	Rodney Richards	(Nov '93)
Phillipe Etienne	(Mar '98)	Gordon Rich-Phillips	(Oct '98)
Peter Gilmour	(July '79)	Graham Rojo	(Aug '97)
David Giddy	(Sept '01)	David Rosenberg	(Jul '99)
Doug Gould	(Nov '88)	Martin Skinner	(Aug '96)
Bob Hayter	(Jan '99)	Bill Spurrier	(Dec '89)
Rodney Hunt	(Aug '01)	Andrew Stopp	(Jul '01)
Geoff Kitchin	(Dec '66)	Peter Story	(Aug '93)
Ian Latham	(Sept '78)	Bob Travers	(Feb '99)
Pamela Lording	(Jul '00)	Sander Vandeth	(Nov '95)
Euan MacMillan	(Dec '92)	Ashleigh West	(Aug '98)
Andrew Merrett	(Jan '91)	Nigel West	(Aug '97)
Sid Mishra	(Apr 01)	Wal Witherick	(Mar '92)

Table of Past Members.

Bodycomb, Jeff.	(09/64 – 05/69)	Whitaker, Geoff.	(12/79 – 05/80)
Douglas, John.	(09/64 – 08/67)	Woodhouse, Ian	(02/80 – 07/00)
Kelly, Jim.	(09/64 – 03/67)	Taylor, Bill.	(05/80 – 08/91)
Timms, Don.	(09/64 – 05/68)	Frost, Merv.	(05/80 – 05/86)
Hodges, Chris.	(07/66 – 05/69)	Lees, George.	(08/80 – 06/86)
Cochrane, Vic.	(08/66 – 03/90)	Johnson, Chris	(02/81 – 02/89)
Long, Cec.	(09/66 – 04/69)	Buxton, Mal.	(03/81 – 07/88)
Mudie, Graeme.	(11/66 – 05/69)	Tyrrell, Russ.	(04/81 – 03/82)
Dale, Aidan.	(03/67 – 11/74)	Daley, Neville.	(07/81 – 11/93)
Veenstra, Sander.	(08/67 – 10/71)	Collins, Ken.	(08/81 – 08/88)
Rohor, George.	(02/68 – 12/69)	Sumner, David.	(04/81 – 02/91)
Kenfield, Les.	(05/68 – 11/74)	Jefferson, Keith.	(09/81 – 05/84)
Hendrickson, Graham	(06/68 – 07/79)	McGillivray, Ray	(10/81 – 11/88)
Royds, Richard.	(07/68 – 10/72)	Webster, Len.	(03/82 – 11/85)
Farrell, Richard.	(07/68 – 12/69)	Ball, Philip.	(12/82 – 05/90)
Gray, Bob.	(04/69 - 08/97)	Shearer, Chris.	(02/83 – 03/92)
Hood, Ray.	(05/69 – 09/74)	Owen, John.	(04/83 – 02/85)
Wescott, Barry.	(05/69 – 07/78)	Reed, Les.	(04/83 – 08/84)
Kemsley, Fred.	(05/69 – 08/74)	McAlister, Jack.	(12/83 – 08/87)
Freeman, Maurice.	(12/69 – 09/71)	Brownscombe, Howard	(08/84 – 05/90)
(rejoined)	(05/78 – 09/81)	Davis, Ivor.	(08/84 – 12/96)
Black, Bill.	(12/69 – 10/71)	Sutcliffe, Michael.	(01/85 – 11/97)
(rejoined)	(07/79 – 07/81)	Hill, David	(02/85 – 07/01)
Dear, Phil.	(05/70 – 01/85)	Wells, Peter.	(07/85 – 08/93)
Schoop, Ralph.	(03/71 – 08/72)	Hutchinson-Brooks, Nigel	(11/85 – 08/98)
Reidy, Jeff.	(06/71 – 07/85)	Martin, Bruce.	(05/86 – 04/89)
Gillham, Laurence.	(09/71 – 11/74)	Taverniti, Mario,	(11/86 – 05/89)
Kelberg, Frank.	(10/71 – 12/79)	Zemlic, John.	(11/87 – 12/89)
Tinning, Bert.	(10/71 – 05/88)	McAlister, Angus.	(08/87 – 02/91)
Shannahan, Ern.	(08/72 – 09/78)	Peile, Les.	(12/87 – 08/88)
Pascoe, Russ.	(10/72 – 08/81)	Burke, Mike.	(08/88 – 02/90)
Sanders, Jim.	(10/72 – 11/86)	Fox, Robert.	(07/88 – 01/91)
Bakken, Lynn.	(01/73 – 05/78)	Close, Ian.	(08/88 – 11/94)
Bundy, John.	(01/73 – 12/83)	Clarke, Yolanta.	(04/89 – 05/90)
Lording, Harry.	(01/73 – 12/92)	Scanlon, Harold	(05/89 – 04/01)
Deam, Syd.	(01/73 - N/A)	Howlett, Michael.	(02/90 – 06/92)
Boer, Henk.	(01/73 – 10/74)	Hunt, Gabrielle.	(03/90 – 10/91)
Morgan, David.	(01/73 – 10/78)	Mitchell, Jamie	(05/90 – 02/99)
Reid, Geoff.	(01/73 – 06/75)	Mitchell, Lloyd	(06/90 – 05/00)
Roberts, Mike.	(01/73 – 07/77)	Bateman, Derek.	(05/90 – 08/93)
Boardman, Ken.	(01/73 – 08/90)	Burns, Chris.	(05/90 – 08/96)
Marlin, Brian.	(08/74 – 02/83)	Castles, Don	(09/90 – 09/00)
Donahey, Jim.	(09/74 – 12/82)	Woodroofe, Graham	(02/91 – 03/98)
McManus, John.	(10/74 – 07/75)	Roberts, Jim.	(08/91 – 09/93)
Walker, Des.	(11/74 – 02/88)	McLean, Scott.	(06/92 – 10/95)
Woods, Terry.	(11/74 – 03/81)	Sutcliffe, Ruth.	(11/92 – 11/97)
McKenna, John.	(11/74 – 11/97)	Phillips, Stephen.	(08/93 – 03/96)
Coad, Michael.	(07/75 -- 07/77)	Nikakis, George	(09/93 – 11/98)
Peaker, Hugh.	(07/77 – 04/83)	Roberts, Dave	(11/94 – 07/98)
Gray, Bruce.	(07/77 – 05/80)	Angel, Ron.	(03/96 -- 07/97)
Lewis, Myles.	(06/78 – 04/81)	Wentworth, Mark	(04/96 – 07/99)
Shrimpton, Blair.	(06/78 – 12/82)	O'Brien, John	(11/97 – 08/01)
Ingersole, Kevin.	(08/78 – 08/79)		
Bezant, Bruce.	(10/78 – 05/91)		
Hayes, Don.	(01/79 – 04/83)		
Smyth, Keith.	(05/79 – 08/80)		

Addendum

It's sometimes said (that is amongst male pilots) that aircraft are like women – they just keep turning up in your life! How true this was for MAG pilot Martin Skinner, who recognised our first aircraft – (1951 Auster J1B 'Aiglet' VH-KBI) – now beautifully restored, parked on the grass (?) at Avalon East for the Airshow Downunder held in 1999.

Martin took this photo of our original purchase, still proudly bearing the name 'Gentle Annie', and no doubt continuing to give sterling service and enjoyment to the current owner Jeffery Gorham in ACT, following the restoration in 1996 by Alan Chappelow, at Sale, Victoria,



Martin Skinner, in almost as good nick as 'Gentle Annie', now 50 years young.



Not content to rest on past glories, MAG achieved another honour as our Skylane VH-BJZ was awarded a certificate for the best presented Cessna 182 at the show. AOPA requested a photo for the front page of the magazine – but despite the fact that we think this picture by former member Rob Fox is pretty good, it never appeared. At the controls – (and paying for the aircraft and the picture) – is MAG pilot Peter Story.