



## I PURCHASED A PORTERFIELD...

Delighted and perhaps a little disappointed with his purchase, Steve Ahrens continues the good fight to get the Porterfield into suitable condition with a little luck and the occasional challenge.

Luck happened, Harvey McBain from the Nelson Aeroplane Company offered to lend me a Bendix magneto. Harvey boxed the magneto up and posted it to Ben at Mildura. Ben soon had the magneto fitted and ground run, he called to say it's all-good come and pick it up. Fantastic! One problem, Victoria had just gone into another COVID lockdown and while we could go into Mildura, when we returned to South Australia we would have to isolate for two weeks. Not going to happen. Then I got the bright idea if we could get the

plane to Wentworth NSW, we could pick it up from there. At the time, there were no border restrictions between Victoria and NSW, and no restrictions between South Australia and NSW. A few phone calls produced the name and number of Andrew Mason, who very kindly agreed to fly the Porterfield across the river Murray, from Mildura to Wentworth. Now all I need is a local pilot to fly it from Wentworth to Rowland Flat. Marc had other commitments for a few weeks, and I was keen to get the plane home, particularly while the weather conditions

were still good. Eventually, I hatched a plan with Lyndon Trethewey.

Leaving Rowland Flat the morning of Sunday June 6th, I made the forty-minute flight to Goolwa and picked Lyndon up for the journey to Wentworth, where I eagerly waited for the Porterfield's arrival. As planned, Andrew arrived and taxied to the newly established refuelling facility, where we topped up the Cherokee, the Porterfield and a jerry can. Ben also arrived to see her off and make sure everything would be ok. It's times like this I am

reminded of the camaraderie between aviators and the fantastic people we are privileged to meet on our journey. While standing on the tarmac, one of the more senior club members of the Wentworth Aero Club came out to look at the Porterfield, with the now familiar question, "what is it"?

While I exchanged pleasantries, Lyndon launched for our planned refuelling and lunch stop at Loxton. This time we had a milk crate to stand on for refuelling with the jerry can, which proved much easier, and the chicken sandwiches were a welcome break before the long leg – for a Porterfield, back to Rowland Flat.

With Lyndon underway, it did not take long for the Cherokee to overtake him and arrive at Rowland Flat well in advance. Hearing Lyndon's inbound call for Rowland Flat, a small contingent stood with an easterly gaze over the Barossa ranges until the small outline of the Porterfield appeared, and at 2:37pm CST

June 6th, the Porterfield finally touched down at her new home on her 80th birthday. Yes, the Porterfield Collegiate N37733 first flew on June 6th 1941. Happy birthday Skinny Bird! Skinny Bird is the affectionate nickname the Porterfield has become known as, for the obvious reason when you stand at the rear of the plane and look at the skinny fuselage.

One last task of dropping Lyndon off at a nearby field to pick up his Tailwind for their return trip to Goolwa. Then fly back to Rowland Flat to see if we can squeeze a Cherokee and Porterfield into a 30' x 40' hangar. After some careful manoeuvring and juggling, we made it happen with a sigh of relief.

While waiting for news on the new magnetos, I began my tail wheel and RAAus conversion with Richard Hasting from Lyndoch Sport Aviation. This is where I learned that a 65hp Continental does not launch a

Porterfield with two POBs into the blue skies with a great deal of enthusiasm. After so many years of flying the Cherokee, it took me a while to get the picture of a much different landing approach without flaps, and the importance of joystick and throttle control.

At this time, I also embarked on studying for, my RAAus L1 maintenance rating. I feel being a diesel mechanic by trade made this a bit easier.

I had a few lessons over the weeks. Then on a cold Sunday morning, during our take-off run on the 600m runway, at the point of lift-off, I noted roughness in the engine. While it rattled through my head that we are committed to the take-off and too late to abort, an authoritative call of "carby heat" came through the headset. I immediately followed the command thinking it cannot hurt and it's about the only option we have. The engine seemed to respond and we climbed at about its usual slow rate. Soon after

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lifting off, I said to Richard "did you feel that"? His immediate reply came through the headset, words to the effect of "f%\$#ing oath, let's make this a low-level circuit and get back on the ground!" After pulling up on the runway, a mag check revealed the left magneto had issues.

We both agreed the hangar would be the Porterfield's immediate destination until the new magneto kit arrived.

During this time, I kept in contact with AJ about the progress of the new magnetos, but AJ's supplier in the States was not interested and said sorry that is how it is. To J's credit, he stuck to his word and told his supplier to stick it. Then told me my best option would be Aircraft Spruce, but he would not be able to buy it any cheaper than me, so it is probably simpler for me to order direct. Wow, what an honest man,

I could not have asked for better help and advice, I did feel privileged once again.

Telling Marc about the whole story and how I would order the mags direct from Aircraft Spruce, he needed a 2" fuel cap for the Pitts, and could we include it in the order. "Absolutely! I'd love to do that for you". The order went in and a new sense of excitement began while I waited for it to be processed. Watching the automated process, it told me everything would be available, with a five-day delay for the fuel cap. Well, I have waited this long and another five days will not hurt. Five days were up and the cap was delayed again, getting impatient, I tried to make contact via

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Ben Dakis hard at work fitting a new Bendix magneto at Mildura... would this put an end to Steve's problems?

the ordering system to see how long this could potentially take, but no reply. Eventually, I obtained the direct email address for one of the people at Aircraft Spruce, it is a slow process because while we are working they are sleeping, and while we are sleeping, they are working. We ascertained this fuel cap would be illusive and delayed for some time, so they removed it from the order and the kit would be on its way.

As you can imagine my eagerness kept growing because my training had stalled and I am keen to go solo.

Shortly after purchasing the Porterfield, I submitted an application to the council to extend the hangar and make it five metres wider to allow for the Porterfield's arrival. Needless to say, this application took much longer than I originally expected, even after visiting the council initially to find the best way of moving this through the system with a minimum of delays. After not hearing anything for about a month I contacted the council who put me in contact with the assigned planner, who informed me the application would have to go to public consultation because he deemed it a change of use. This totally miffed me because our hangar, built in 1984 had only been used to hangar our Cherokee and now I simply wanted to add a lean-to and house a second aeroplane, and this expert deems it a change of use. I'm not going to bore you with what transpired because it is another story all of its own.

After clearing customs and paying the appropriate duties, the magneto kit rocked up

in my office. I eagerly opened the package and stared at my investment, like a kid with a new bike on Christmas morning.

Keen to get these babies fitted I organised a mutual time with good friend Mark Gurner to assist with the installation. In the main, everything went well, the magnetos bolted up neatly, new spark plugs installed, and a new shielded ignition harness routed through the engine baffling. With everything in place, and the timing completed, the moment of truth arrived and the Armstrong starter swung the A65 into life. After a good ground run and thorough check over, we were ready for the cowls to be put in place and close the bonnet. Just one catch, the bonnet hit the front left spark plug harness, and would not close! Not to worry, a step drill and Dremel tool soon had an appropriate hole in the appropriate place, and a nice little domed bump stuck in position with urethane.

Another good ground run and the Skinny Bird is ready for training to recommence.

Finally, on Saturday, August 14th 2021, Richard felt confident to send me solo. Another fantastic feeling, so much so that after I touched down, I reapplied the power for another circuit and then another.

It was forty years after my first solo with Bruce Hartwig, at the age of 19 and 8.4 hours, I repeated the same excitement taking 6.6 hours with Richard Hasting.

I am delighted to tell you, the passion deepens and the journey continues.

## My Three First Solos

Regular R&T contributor Neil Follett recalls three milestones in his flying history.



The real one was at Moorabbin on 7th December 1964 in the Royal Victorian Aero Club Chipmunk, VH-RVS. After three successful circuits and landings with senior instructor Mark Vanes, he evacuated the back cockpit, warned the tower and sent me off. I can't remember if the Chippie behaved any differently with just me aboard, but I distinctly remember at 250 feet raising the flaps and throttling back a little, trimming and then turning around to make sure there was no one in the back cockpit. I was alone.

I guess every time you make a solo flight in a new type after an endorsement that could be called a first solo, on that type. That way some pilots could claim dozens of first solos.

My second claim to a first solo status was on 3rd January 1972 at Casey Field, Berwick. It was in Leopard Moth VH-UUL. The first time I flew the Leopard I was on my own, with no passenger or instructor. In those days an individual endorsement was required for every new type you flew. After about four hours of experience in the Leopard, I received my endorsement courtesy of John Pilkington. The fastest endorsement I ever received, just 45 minutes.

My third first solo was only recently. In a Tecnam P92, telephone number 24-3964, at Coldstream. That was to gain my RA licence. I was pleasantly surprised that because of my previous aeronautical experience, only five hours dual and one

hour solo was needed to qualify for it. Being a new type of licence, I feel justified in claiming a first solo.

My first experience with the Tecnam P92 was a bit of a cultural shock. It started as soon as I lifted the engine cowl to check the Rotax air-cooled engine. I saw a reservoir of coolant. My instructor explained the Rotax had liquid-cooled cylinder heads.

Sitting in the cockpit to familiarize myself with everything I asked my instructor where the mixture control was "it doesn't have one" was the reply. Shocks kept coming...

My next question was about the location of the carburettor heat control. "It doesn't have one, carby heat is on all the time" was the reply. The next surprise was that soon after I opened the throttle, we were airborne. I was certain we had some home-sick angels on board. Surprises continued. Levelling out, power was reduced to 4800rpm. That's red line plus - unachievable in a Cessna.

The final surprise is that with no mixture control with idle cut-off, to stop the engine, the ignition is switched off. The engine stops immediately shaking the whole aircraft.

Having overcome all the surprises, the Tecnam was a nice aircraft to fly; sensitive on the controls but very docile, particularly in the hands of an ageing pilot. That solo in the Tecnam was the first time I had made a solo flight in 33 years and allowed me to strike off one item on my aeronautical bucket list. Gee, it was nice.

