

# THE NSW SPORT AIRCRAFT CLUB

## NEWSLETTER

*December - January 2017*





# Editor's letter

Hi again folks!

To start with, I'd like to thank the 46 members so far that made the change to electronic distribution. It really makes a difference to the Club and gives us more options. This issue is now 20 pages long and still costs less to print and send than the old 16 pages before

If you would like to make the switch, just send me a quick email asking to change to [nswsacnews@gmail.com](mailto:nswsacnews@gmail.com) from the email account you would like to receive the newsletter on

In this issue: Our **President** and **Secretary** report on the latest happenings, **Phil Ayrton** elaborates on dealings with Crown Land, **Arthur Napper's** family visit our field, we visit **The Missions** on the Hawkesbury, The **Gallaghers** share their trip to Clare and beyond, we fly to **Airventure Australia**, we cover bits and pieces of Club life, and last (but not least) an interesting perspective on one of our most understated members: the legendary **Steve Cohen**

I sincerely hope you enjoy your Newsletter and wish you blue skies, tail winds, and all the very best for the upcoming festive season

Cheers

**Pablo Depetris**



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**We are located** approximately 15 Km South of Campbelltown. Head South on APPIN ROAD, Left at WOODLAND ROAD, Right at KARRABUL ROAD, Continue onto WEDDERBURN ROAD, (Through the Georges River Gorge) Right at MINERVA ROAD, Continue onto LYSAGHT ROAD, and then as far as the airfield gate.

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The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length, clarity and to prevent libel. The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily endorsed by the Editor, Committee, or Members of the NSW SAC, unless expressly stated.

**Cover photo**  
John Gallagher's mighty CT4 over wind farm near Jamestown, South Australia  
Photo: Chris Gallagher



Rou and Dawn Andrews, receiving honorary social membership of our Club for their outstanding service to the Club over many years. 5 November 2017.

# Words from the President

**A**nother year is almost upon us, and hopefully most of us will begin to unwind ready for the Silly Season. Although we are meant to unwind, for some reason this seems to be the busiest time of year!

NSWSAC is also a busy place. We have the Children's Christmas party coming up on the 2nd December, and also the Christmas party for us grown ups on the 16th December. In fact, this whole year at the club has been busy. The committee has had a total of 7 meetings this year! Although many items discussed by the committee at these meetings are for small matters, this year we were thrown a curve ball with Rou and Dawn resigning as Caretakers. So we had to find a Caretaker within a reasonable time frame, and not to mention the work to be done to the Caretaker's cottage before the Caretaker could even reside at the airfield.

I will apologise in advance as to the length of this report, but in the last few Annual General Meetings that I have attended, I tend to hear this word transparency a lot. This committee is all about transparency, and doing things that are in the club's best interest, so it would make sense that we advise the membership of what has been happening in a little more detail. Anyone can access the website and find the committee meeting minutes online. This will give a general idea of what is going on around the place, but not all of us have the time to sit there and read through it, just to work out what is happening. So, I thought I might summarise it for you.

It all started with a professional inspection from a Builder. After the Builder inspected the Clubhouse, Caretaker's cottage and Bunkhouse, they left us with a professional building inspection report. We then had to decide what the next course of action was, as the Caretaker's cottage needed some much sought after maintenance. So, with the building report as a guide, the decision was made that the place needed a refresher. This consisted of a new kitchen with new cupboards and bench tops, new carpets, new kitchen flooring, painting in all rooms of the walls, skirting and architraves. The floor needed to be patched up in certain areas before any carpet was laid, and the bathroom needed some work which included an exhaust fan, new lighting and some lights for the backyard and garage. The majority of the work was completed by the offer of Workday credits to members, and we even offered a double workday credit day! Many members pitched in and in the end we got there.

The Clubhouse has aluminium windows installed, but the rest of the place had some windows that worked and some that did not. There was also no flyscreens on any of the windows in the Bunkhouse and Caretaker's cottage, so again, the decision was made to fit the entire area with new aluminium windows with fly screens, for not much extra cost than only doing a select few windows. With the summer temperatures we get at Wedderburn, this is a fantastic relief to the Caretaker and anyone staying in the Bunkhouse. A new water pressure pump was installed that serves the entire area. There were many things that still needed attention, so specialist trades were brought in to get these jobs completed in a quick time frame. At the end of the day, this all costs money, and as most of you would know, any work is not cheap, so the committee have done their best to ensure that the club is not ripped off, and that we always get the best deal for our

money. The reality is that the club is an ever expanding place, and it needs ongoing maintenance to keep it ticking. The place is looking quite pristine! All monthly bank statements are displayed in the minutes, showing what goes out as expenditures, visible to anyone who wants to take a look.

Then Steve Pate was selected as our Caretaker, and almost 5 months on is doing a fantastic job in the role of caretaker at this airfield. He has contributed greatly to this club in the short amount of time he has been here. In the early days of Steve's arrival, he mentioned that he is quite the handyman, and would be more than happy to do odd jobs here and there. That was music to the committee's ears, and as a result, Steve has done a huge amount of work for us, finishing off the Caretaker's cottage. He also built the rear steps to the back of the premises and the steps at the back of the clubhouse kitchen. There are many other little jobs that Steve has done since he has been here, which include cleaning the mower shed, fixing locks on doors, setting up a working roster with separate folders that include important airfield contacts, many little instruction signs around the place and now is even starting to cut the grass around the airfield with the ride on mowers! I have even heard in the pipeline that Glenn will allow him to cut the grass runway! Watch this space!

By the time you read this, the Eastern road will have been sealed along with any existing entrances to taxi ways cleaned up and the clubhouse parking area potholes and trenches filled up. A massive thanks to Glenn Buttsworth for this tremendous unpaid effort! The club has paid for the cost of material, but Glenn's time is not charged! What an absolute legend! Thank you Glenn.

You may have noticed some other smaller things change around the airfield also. There is a large Remondis bin near the BBQ area that has always been locked, but the padlock has now been changed and only Steve has the key. This bin is for the rubbish that is collected from around the toilet and clubhouse smaller bins. This large bin was emptied frequently, as it was filled up by members with keys, but since the padlock has been changed, it is now emptied about once a month. This has saved the club money. I did not realise this arrangement existed, so some members may have been a little disgruntled with me as I made the decision to change the lock, but we need to keep everyone on the same page, hence the reason this was not Newsflashed! Quite a number of rubbish bins have been removed from around the clubhouse area, as there were too many bins. We were finding that members were filling these bins up with their own rubbish from home, or from their hangar. The bins that are there now are minimal and more than enough for the clubhouse related rubbish.

Talking about rubbish, hopefully everyone has seen the recycling bins around the clubhouse. This is new and something we didn't have before, so it's nice that we can all do something for the environment.

The sale of alcohol in the clubhouse fridge has been removed. This was due to members not paying for their drinks. Given alcohol is quite expensive, the club was out of pocket a fair amount each month. Soft drinks and water are only available now, but the fridge will be stocked with alcohol for any workdays and



other social events. Steve will change the drinks price sign to reflect this. I must admit, I love the little reminder signs. Even something as small as the sign on the clubhouse door that says please close the door, is fantastic. A while ago before the signs, the clubhouse doors were left open for a period of time, resulting in many birds entering and doing their business inside the clubhouse! Yuk!!

There are plenty of other smaller items that have been streamlined or changed around the place, but I won't bore you anymore with the details. These have all been done to make the club a better place, or are in the club's best interest to take on board, to assist in a smooth day to day running of the airfield.

Some upcoming items that are on the cards for NSWSAC include a new Yanmar pump and pump house to be installed. There was a time when there were 2 pumps, but one decided to go for a walk, so now we are relying on the one pump for all of our water supply to the large tank at the Southern end. This new pump will supply relief to the existing pump, as well as supply extra pumping capacity in case of a fire.

The committee has agreed to purchase a second hand vehicle (ute) for the club. Would you believe that the Mitsubishi Triton we currently have has 270,000 km on it, well past its use by date, and needs quite a bit of TLC. The committee has decided that the time has come to purchase a second hand, low kilometre, reliable brand ute for the club. The existing Mitsubishi will be turned into a fire truck using one of the fire trailers we already have. This will assist the airfield's fire fighting capabilities. Speaking of fire fighting capabilities, the committee has also agreed to install fire extinguishers of different chemical fire fighting abilities along the length of the runway as required. We are in talks with fire fighting specialists to help understand what is required. It's not just bush fires that we need to be prepared for, but any chemical fires that occur at a hangar or aircraft, and these need to be easily and readily accessible.

Well, that's enough from me, I hope I have not put you to sleep as you still have the rest of the Newsletter to get through.

Until the next chat, take care.

**Jason Camilleri.**



# From the Secretary's Desk

## Goings on at Wedderburn

### Sealing of the Main Road.

Members who have been to Wedderburn recently will have noted that sealing of the road is progressing well under the expert guidance of Glenn Buttsworth. These works involve sealing of the road from the southern extremity of the present sealed section of the road just south of the Northern Gate to the North side of the Middle Gate. If you do not understand that you will see it when you get there.

### Weather Cam

This is one of the most exciting developments for years. The cameras will be delivered in the next few days and Pablo Depetris plans to install them this week if possible. Watch the club website. I guarantee that they will be better than the first ones that came out for Kingsford Smith Airport. When I looked that up on Day 1 some years ago I got a great shot of Berowra Waters!

### Refurbishment of the Gents Toilet

Planning is well underway and tenders have been issued for quotes to carry out this work. Hopefully the result will be something of which the club can be proud. A final result might be expected in the first few months of next year. Funds have been set aside for this project.

### Upgrade and Refreshing of the clubhouse

Quotes have been considered for upgrading and refreshing of the interior of the clubhouse. Our Caretaker Steve has undertaken to carry out much of the work.

### Tenure review

The Tenure Review to which I referred last issue has not yet occurred, but it might at any time in the next two months.

### Access ramp

Phil Ayrton has drawn up plans for a Graded Access Ramp to the front door of the club house. This will extend from the front (eastern) door to the east, descending, then turn around 90 degrees to the south, towards the car park where it will reach ground level. Quotes have been invited to do the work.

### Mogas

There has been considerable discussion about the provision of Mogas at SAC WBN. As many light aircraft these days are designed to use Mogas, the committee considers worth investigating the feasibility of providing a supply of Mogas via a pump. Ray Feneley is following this up re details.

### Arthur Napper's Ashes

Arthur Napper's ashes were scattered over the field by air with great respect by Ian Harvey on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup>, in accordance with his wishes.

### Watering system/Fire fighting equipment

The committee has considered various fire fighting options and has decided to locate appropriate fire extinguishers at frequent intervals (to be decided) along the eastern side of the runway close to the hangars and aircraft park, where they will be readily accessible in the event of a fire. The present 4WD utility will be maintained at the field with a water tank and pump on the tray in the event that it is needed. It will be maintained for airfield use only and will not be registered for road use as it is showing its age. Another younger, suitable (possibly 4WD) utility will be purchased second hand for the use of the caretaker



### Finally

Below is just another reason that you should have this Newsletter delivered electronically!

For the engineers amongst you:

Engineering made simple...

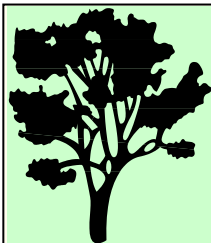
<https://youtu.be/QSeilYyVbw>

Until next time please,

Fly Safe!



Jock Anderson  
28th November 2017

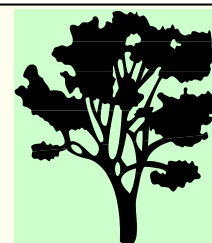


*Need some exotic plants? You can choose from a wide selection near the airfield, just around the corner at #7 Blackburn Road.*

**HARLAND'S Nursery and Landscaping**

**Phone 4634 1234 or 0402 086 032, or drop by and see Charles or Clayton.**

**\*\*The Harlands also do hangar concrete slabs, at very reasonable prices\*\***



# Land Owners Consent...the easy way

I recently had a question about the easiest way to get the Crown Land people to sign a Development Application form in the Owners Consent section, when preparing an application for modifications to a hangar at our site at Wedderburn. I'm sure you will all know that any application to Wollondilly Shire Council has a section marked Owners Consent that needs to be signed by the owner, in our case that is the crown, as we occupy a crown lease, so I started by re-reading the articles I wrote in 2014-15 in previous newsletters, where I broke the process down into a number of steps and then spent some time on each step in successive newsletter editions. As I read the section on Owners Consent I could see an improvement that I could have made to that part, and it is important to fill in the forms like DA forms correctly as they are a legal document, and if not correct they can be challenged later by an opponent and potentially found to be null and void, and outcome none of us would relish after investing so much time and effort preparing an application for work on your hangar site. Crown Lands now have a form that should

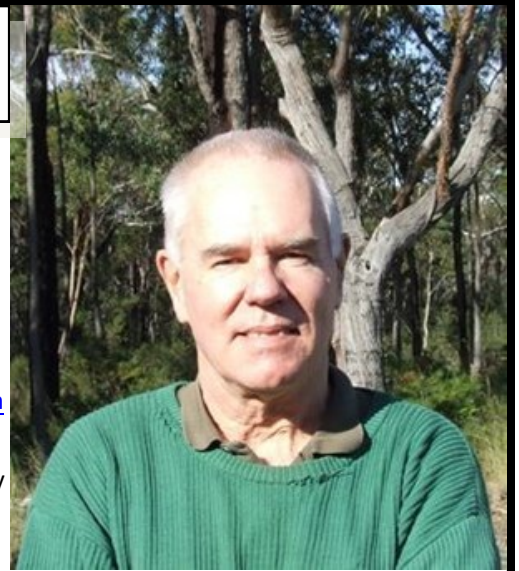
be used when applying for owners consent on a Development Application, it consists of around 5 pages and includes plenty of information about the process. Here is a link to that document:

[http://www.crownland.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/651733/AT\\_Landowner\\_s\\_Consent\\_Landowner\\_s\\_consent\\_application\\_Aug\\_2014.pdf](http://www.crownland.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/651733/AT_Landowner_s_Consent_Landowner_s_consent_application_Aug_2014.pdf)

Try plugging that into your computer thingy and have a look at it so you can become familiar with it if you intend to submit an application for any new work or to modify an existing DA, or if you like a bit more of a challenge you could just go to the website at:

[http://www.crownland.nsw.gov.au/crown\\_land](http://www.crownland.nsw.gov.au/crown_land)

In the top right hand corner of their home page you'll see a box marked "FORMS" and the letters of the alphabet, if you hit on the L box it will take you to the list of forms starting with L and the Landowners Consent form is at the top of the list. As well as making the submission easier it also spells out the process, the cost and provides



some useful information. Have a look if you find yourself with some idle time on the screen, and I also found looking through some of the previous newsletters on the new club website very interesting, and you might too. It seems like a much easier, simpler and more intuitive website to navigate than the previous version, so I'd also like to thank those involved in putting the new website together, I think it's a great improvement.

**Phil Ayrton**

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November saw the ashes scattering ceremony for **Arthur Napper**. It would have been his 97<sup>th</sup> birthday and it also happened to be the birthday of his grandson Glenn, who released the ashes from Ian Harvie's Aeronca.

Arthur was Member No. 2 and a Life Member. About 40 members of the extended Napper family attended the ceremony. The Club provided a sausage sizzle, with Vic Laybutt, his partner Alice Collett, and June Nicholson doing the catering, and Diane Brookes hosting the event. The Napper family provided the most incredible cake – a sort of giant cannoli containing individual cannolis with exotic fillings.

One of Arthur's relatives gave a speech and Peter Hodgens replied on behalf of the club, expressing appreciation of Arthur's contribution and rounding off with the comment that not too many pilots have an airfield named after them!

**Peter Lightbown**





# Upcoming Club Events



## *NSW Sport Aircraft Club Children's Christmas Party*

*Saturday 2 December 2017 12 to 3pm at the Clubhouse*

*Free sausage sizzle, lollies, Jumping Castle, lolly bomber, jeep rides!*

*Bring Sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, grand children, neighbours and friends*



## THE 2017 WEDDERBURN CHRISTMAS TOY RUN IS ON AGAIN THIS YEAR

Any members wishing to donate toys or gifts to the Salvation Army Campbelltown can do so this year at the club

The Salvation Army helps disadvantaged Australians without discrimination, including people who are hungry, homeless, abandoned or abused

Please bring any new toys, gifts or cash donations to the clubhouse and leave with our Caretaker by 16 December (Club Christmas Party)

Your kind contribution will help make a difference to people in need



## *NSW Sport Aircraft Club Christmas Party*

*Saturday 16 December 2017*



- 5pm start with an array of finger food followed by a BBQ Spit Roast Buffet with all the trimmings, finish off with a selection of Desserts (please BYO wine glasses and drinks)
- Dance the night away with DJ 'Destination Dance Floor' until closing time 10pm
- \$20 per person. Registration closes 10/12/17 due to catering requirements, no late arrivals please.
- Tickets may be purchased from our caretaker Steve Pate or by EFT to the Club account (with name plus code X)
- For group bookings please book under one name and state number of guests
- Christmas Hats is the dress code for the evening. Most outstanding Christmas Hat prize to be won on the night!
- Please contact Donna Handley if you have any dietary concerns on 0409 172 776 or email [donnadqn@gmail.com](mailto:donnadqn@gmail.com)

### Important Wedderburn – Napper airstrip fly neighbourly information

The neighbouring built-up areas at Wedderburn and Appin are noise sensitive, please avoid overflying below 1000ft AGL

**YWBN CTAF 122.55 MHz - Area Frequency 124.55 MHz - Position 34° 11.2' S 150° 48.3' E**

# The road is coming!



Roadbase material being laid



Road Levelling



Grading

**A**s you can see from the pictures on this page, **Glenn Buttsworth** has been very busy finishing the section of access road that had been left unsealed. So far 570 tonnes of road base have been laid and levelled and it is expected that the sealing will be completed sometime in early December. The car park outside the clubhouse has been levelled too. Go Glenn!



Roadbase material arriving



# Airventure Australia, Narromine 2017

**F**rom Thursday 19 to Saturday 21 October RAAus organised the second “OzKosh” or Airventure Australia as it is now known in Narromine NSW

We flew in with my son Richard on Thursday and stayed until Saturday afternoon just after the airshow, camping right next to our Cavalier. The weather was quite good all weekend except for Thursday evening that it rained all night. Fortunately our tent

was up and ready to go by the time the rain started

This event has the general support of a large group of aviators as it is seen as “our own Oshkosh” by many people

This year, bizarrely, the organisers decided to completely fence off the public area and have the airshow viewing area in a dusty remote paddock. I hope these issues will be sorted in the future as I believe the main reason people fly in to these events is to

participate at a very personal level, not to be kept at arms length behind a fence

Kind of reminds me of a Wings over Illawarra a few years back where no aerobatics were allowed. Fancy watching an RAAF Hornet doing steep turns...

Having had my whinge, I'd like to nevertheless thank the organisers and sponsors for making it possible through their efforts

**Pablo Depetris**





# Airventure Australia in pictures:



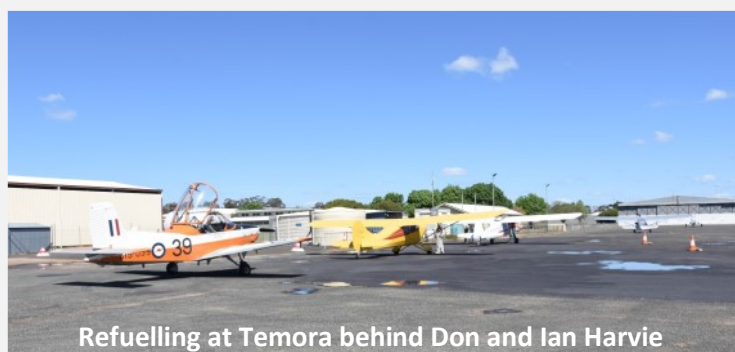


# TO CLARE AND BEYOND

After several weeks of clear weather a change came through just as we were about to fly to Clare in South Australia for the Spring fly in for the Antique Aeroplane Association of Australia. We had thought of getting away on Wednesday 11th October but we woke to low cloud and showers, so no go. On Thurs conditions had improved but strong winds were forecast. Ian Harvie in his Aeronca, Don Harvie and John Carr in Austers and John and I in the CT4 departed Wedderburn mid morning. We had 40kt winds on the nose most of the way to Temora, the Austers must have just about been going backwards.



John on approach to Temora



Refuelling at Temora behind Don and Ian Harvie

After refuelling we headed for Hay and stayed in cabins in the Hay Plains Caravan Park. We had a great meal in the pub next door followed by a good night sleep before heading back to the airport. There we met two other antiquers on their way to Clare ( Clin Ashton Martin and Barbara, accompanied by Ian Pearce and his son) before flying to Wentworth for fuel, and meeting up with even more antiquers, including another CT4.

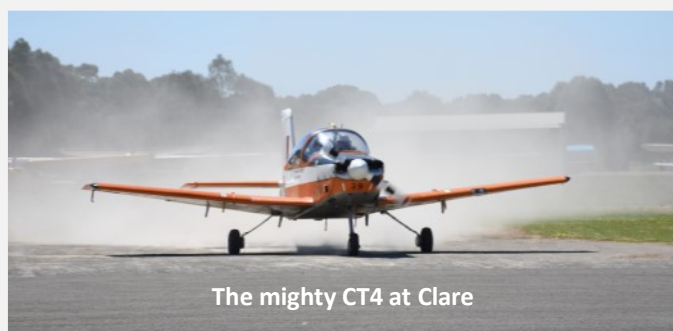


John Carr and Ian Harvie at Wentworth



Don's Auster back at Wentworth

Don felt nostalgic as he had bought his Auster from this airfield. After an interesting landscape of patchwork like irrigated fields , we flew over hundreds of miles of boring rough scrub with little habitation before reaching the fertile plains south of Burra, then it got greener and greener until we saw Clare Valley airfield in the middle distance.



The mighty CT4 at Clare

What an amazing job the folk here have done. Great runways , wonderful club facilities and friendly people. AAAA had arranged for fuel and buses to transport flyers to accommodation. We stayed in cabins in Clare caravan park. One of the most beautiful parks I have ever stayed in.



Whippet at Clare Valley (Note corrugated iron roof!)

It had taken us about 6 hours total flying from Wedderburn to Clare but obviously longer for the other three. We generally departed later than the others and overtook them before the next stop. It was amazing that even though we knew where they were from OzRunways we still had great difficulty seeing them in the air. I am deeply impressed by the early aviators who flew around this huge country without any aids except a map from a school atlas and a ruler.

The weather was kind and over the weekend a total of 72 aircraft visited the field, one even flew over from Western Australia. It was a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. A delicious meal was enjoyed by all at the dinner on the Saturday night.



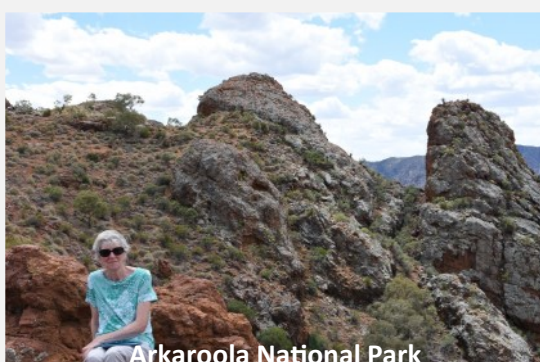
On the Sunday, Don, Ian, and John Carr, headed back east, again overnighing at Hay before continuing back to Wedderburn. Unfortunately the weather system had turned and they had head winds all the way.



Murray River West of Wentworth

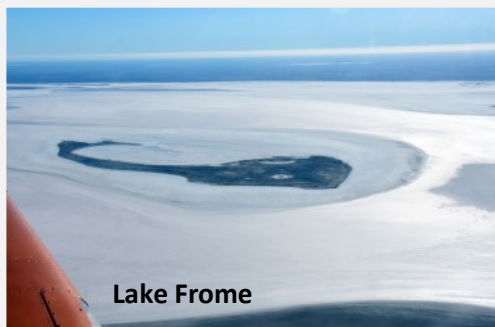
We had decided not to return directly, and use the chance to see a bit more of the country. So we set off to the north, flying for an hour and 50 min, over Jamestown and Wilpena Pound to Arkaroola. Absolutely awesome country. We landed at Arkaroola airfield, about 8 km from the village and were picked up by Mark, the son of the owner Doug Spriggs. (Doug owns an Auster and a couple of Cessnas used for scenic flights). This place is in the middle of nowhere in the north Flinders Ranges. Not even Telstra coverage. The 610 square kilometre property is a privately owned and

sanctuary. (One was 5 and a half hours to The Ridgetop, and the other 4 and a half hours, to Echo Camp and Bannaranna Gorge, made longer by having to change a flat tyre.) This is just the most amazing country, wild, rugged and beautiful. Some of the tracks had gradients of greater than 45 degrees but the view at the top was worth the rough ride. There were rare yellow footed rock wallabies seen around waterholes in the early morning and at dusk, as well as Euros and grey kangaroos, and the bird life was prolific. Many male emus were seen with clutches of young? It is a geologists paradise with just about every type of sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rock and mineral and rock formation, that I have ever heard of.



Arkaroola National Park

We put a dash of fuel on board Wednesday morning before taking off, and flying around the property before heading south east across the bottom end of Lake Frome to Broken Hill. Beautiful.



Lake Frome

booked into a lovely "log cabin" for two nights. Unfortunately the paddle wheeler we were planning to go on was not running due to engine problems and the bush poet we had hoped to listen to had moved on. (...and we don't know where he are..... as Banjo Patterson would have said.) We did get to do a bus tour of the area including a visit to cotton fields and the gin and the grave of Fred Hollows. On Thursday evening we visited the Chinese restaurant at Bourke Bowling Club and ran into Denise and Noel Carmody who were doing a grey nomad tour with their Caravan. They were even staying at the same Park as us.

We had intended leaving on the Friday, and flying to Moree then Coffs Harbour, Kempsey and back home over the next four days, but the weather gods had different ideas. Bourke was drenched by 44mm of rain overnight and the day dawned to heavy cloud and showers. We visited the "Back of Bourke" Exhibition Centre and a local Art Gallery before returning to the Park and having lunch with Noel and Denise.

A careful check of the forecast conditions showed a window of clear weather behind the front that had come through, but as this front was sitting over the northern ranges, going via Coffs and the coast was

not a good idea. Consequently we packed up on the Saturday morning and headed back to the airfield. After refuelling we departed, again into strong head winds, and flew direct to Wedderburn, skirting around Narromine (because Air Venture was in full swing there) and Mudgee, and overflying Katoomba.

Just over 3 and a quarter hours nonstop. I was good and ready for a walk around when we got out of the plane.

All up we had completed over 16 hours of flying and covered much of the state of N.S.W and a bit of S.A. We both thoroughly enjoyed our time away and look forward to many more trips in the future.

financed wilderness sanctuary. Our accommodation was motel style and we had all meals at the resort. It was quite hot during the day, but the accommodation was air conditioned.



Arkaroola Village

We went on a trip to one of five observatories on the property the first night, and over the next two days did two four wheel drive troop carrier style trips to parts of the

Unfortunately we did not have the "correct" carnet and had to pay a surcharge of 20 cents a litre for fuel. Annoying, but what can you do. They have it and you want it so you have to pay, as there is no alternative. Everywhere else we went we could just use our own credit cards. The head winds were strong as we headed up to Wilcannia and then followed the quietly meandering Darling up to Bourke. Just over four hours of

flying from Arkaroola to Bourke. We tied down the CT4 and called for transport to Kidman's Camp Caravan Park where we were

**Chris Gallagher**



Back home!

# Long read: Soaring and exploring with Steve Cohen

Story by Stu Nettle

**T**he name Steve Cohen remains largely unknown in surfing circles. Steve was a leading surfer, shaper, and explorer yet he left scant evidence of his achievements despite discovering two of Australia's most famous waves. One is the heaviest wave on the East Coast, the other its most perfect. Reasons for Steve Cohen's anonymity may lay in the fact that just three years after the last discovery, he quit surfing altogether, though his exit wasn't quite so clear-cut. As Steve says of it, "I put the board away and I went surfing in three dimensions".

The Illawarra Escarpment is the only part of Australia's Great Dividing Range that touches the sea. Starting just south of Cronulla, the escarpment rises as sheer coastal cliffs that run the length of the Royal National Park before turning inland at Bald Hill above Stanwell Park. From there, the eastern side of the escarpment falls sharply to the coast below, the reefs and points that dot the Illawarra coastline are a product of it's ancient geology, while the western side slopes gently inland.



*The view from Bald Hill looking down upon Stanwell Park with the Illawarra Escarpment in the background.*

I had arranged to meet Steve Cohen over the top of the escarpment at an airstrip carved out of Eucalypt forest. Hidden to all but planes passing overhead, the entrance is found by following exhaustive instructions and navigating a maze of back roads. Just when I thought I'd taken a wrong turn, that the thick bush surrounding me couldn't possibly harbour a working runway, I came across a gate and a sign confirming my arrival. I called the number I'd been given.

Five minutes later a four wheel drive ute pulls up at the gate and I get waved onto the property. I stop to shake hands and introduce myself. Steve is stocky, he has a Viking crown of grey hair - longer on the side, balding up top - and he's pulling keenly on a tobacco rollie. "Just follow me and we'll pull up behind my hangar."

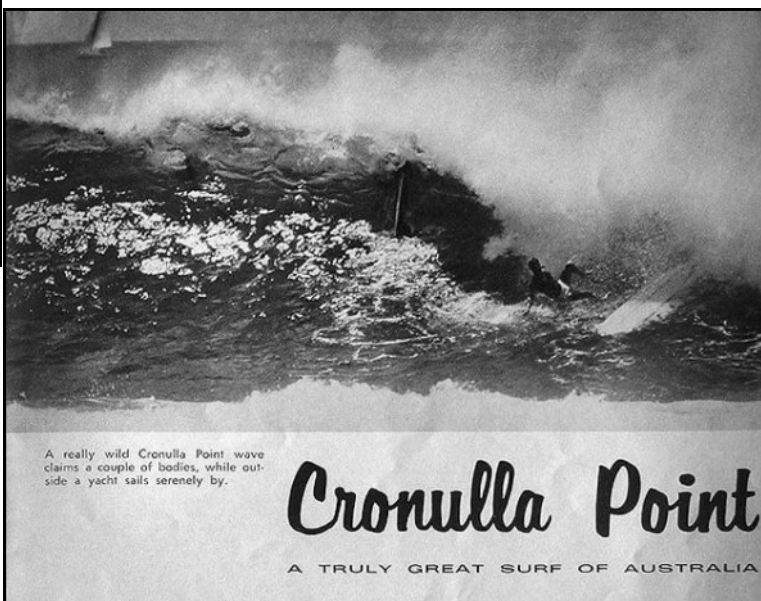
Just out of sight from the road the bush abruptly clears and we're at the end of a tarmac runway perhaps a kilometre long. To the left are a series of aircraft hangars in various shades of Colorbond. Most are shaped like oversized sheds with large sliding doors at ground level, though some have second floor verandas and viewing rooms that overlook the airstrip. My immediate impression is that of a country club. And it *is* a pri-

vate club, the airstrip is funded by members, but any resemblance to a genteel golf club ends when Steve starts in on the stories.

After parking our cars, Steve joyfully recounts how his crazy neighbour once landed his plane in the short side street that runs perpendicular from the airstrip. And in the time it takes to walk from the car to his door he's told me a few more airborne wild west stories. I interpret them less as braggadocio than as an icebreaker - who doesn't enjoy some derring-do? - though I also get the impression that 'fun' for Steve always involves a transgression: maybe a rule or convention, maybe safety too.

Born in 1950, Steve Cohen grew up around Cronulla, and heading into his mid-teens he was one of the better surfers at Cronulla Point where a melange of surf craft would gather in big southerly swells: surfboards, skis, Paipo body boards, and the ever present bodysurfers. All held court at Second Reef.

"There were more bodysurfers out there than anything else. There were really only three of us board riders out on the big days because so very few people surfed it. There were no leg ropes of course, but the bodysurfers and body boarders would try to save our boards if we lost them."



*"Providing both good body and board waves, the Point is something of an institution, a meeting place for all local surfers." From the pages of Surfabout, 1965.*

*"He discovered Ours, discovered Aussie Pipe, and then the serious pioneering began..."*

The three guys who surfed the point at size were Steve Cohen, Ray Ryan, and Steve Hague - affectionately known as Hag. "He was radical. Borderline insane," says Steve with a chuckle. Slightly older than the other two, Hag was in possession of a short wheel base Land Rover and drove without any sense of self-preservation, for it or the occupants.

Cronulla wasn't short of heavy reef breaks and crowds were yet to spoil the experience, but the exploratory pull was strong. "Hag and I were explorers. We'd always be heading out to find new spots, bashing that Land Rover



down any track that led to the coast, and sometimes not even tracks."

During a swell in 1965 they made their first discovery, though it'd be 35 years before the rest of the world caught up. Near the entrance to Botany Bay is Cape Solander, around which a demonic right-hander breaks. I needn't describe it further, everyone has seen footage of the wave which was reborn as Ours near the turn of the century. And despite its current infamy, Steve recalls being underwhelmed at the time.

"The first day we surfed it was probably this big," he indicates a wave slightly larger than head high, "but it wasn't all that exciting. It was just a novelty. Cronulla Point was a more favoured wave." Yet the word got around and within a few swells other surfers, bodysurfers, and Paipo riders were also lobbing themselves into the abyss, or they were pulling back. The wave became known as Pikers Hole, and of its many monikers the original remains the best.

That first day was an inconspicuous opening for a wave that Mark Mathews would later claim is "pound for pound the heaviest wave in the world." When he sees modern footage of the wave, Steve can barely believe it. "I just didn't think it was a very good spot." Though they hadn't discovered perfection, Steve, Ray, and Hag surfed Pikers a few more times before the old exploratory impulse kicked in again.



***Pikers Hole, Ours, Cape Fear, whatever you call the wave it's still not a 'very good spot', however it can deliver a thrill, or beating, like no other. Richie Vaculik at the Red Bull Cape Fear contest 2016 (Red Bull)***

In late 1965 and early 1966 they began making trips down south, typically bypassing known places for the gaps in the map. The coastline between Ulladulla and Jervis Bay became a happy hunting ground. On one trip they were trying to get to Steamers Beach when Hag's Land Rover first blew a diff then ran out of petrol. Steve and another guy, Robert Griffiths, flagged a car, got petrol, and went back but Hag and his Landy were nowhere to be seen. There was nothing more to be done, the stranded duo walked and hitched home, arriving back in Cronulla at 3am bitterly cold and tired.

The very next weekend was Easter 1966 and the trio set off again, though this time the goal was Wreck Bay Aboriginal Settlement. In 1965, Aboriginal activists had taken the Freedom Ride but Australia's first people were still on the very fringes of society. White Australia largely left them alone, which may explain why no surfers had yet stood in the village at Wreck Bay and looked across to the

lefthander that peeled off the opposite headland.

During the day we spend together there are few instances when Steve Cohen cracks a smile. "He's as dry as a Muslim wedding," says one acquaintance I speak to beforehand. Yet he beams when he recalls that day at Wreck Bay. "It looked good from a distance, so we all paddled across. And from up close it was spectacular." In the next five minutes that word gets repeated a number of times. "The tubes we had were *spectacular*. Just unbelievable."

What was also unbelievable was the timing. Just two months later Bruce Brown's *The Endless Summer* was released, a movie that turned surfers everywhere into the search for the perfect wave. Yet Steve, Hag, and Griffio had already found their version, and unlike Cape St Francis they didn't have to fabricate its quality. Nor did they broadcast its location to the world - though they did tell some friends.

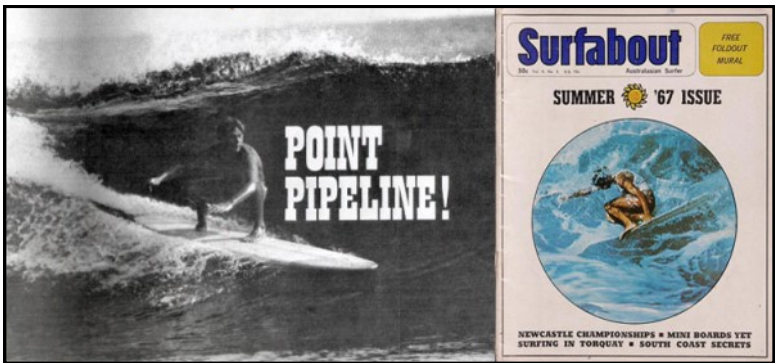


***Steve Cohen, first days at Wreck Bay, in repose and coming off the bottom. And the swimmers? "I had board shorts on but they just disintegrated."***

The first surfers in on the deal were Ray Ryan and Rolf 'Rotten' Meyer. Those five guys stayed tight-lipped about the find, if any new faces came along they had to ride in the floor of the Land Rover from Nowra onwards. In early 1967 some photos made their way to Jack Eden's *Surfabout* for a story called "Point Pipeline" yet no locations were divulged. The article is attributed to Steve but he's adamant he wasn't the author. Most likely the article was the work of an editor using any means to lengthen his list of contributors. But these charades couldn't last, not with a wave of this quality. The group surfed it for a year figuring out the best conditions for the wave, but their disappearing and reappearing act didn't go unnoticed, not when they'd hop out of the Landy back in Cronulla grinning like Cheshire cats.

Steve believes the beans were spilled after they were followed all the way from Cronulla. From there a trickle of surfers would swing

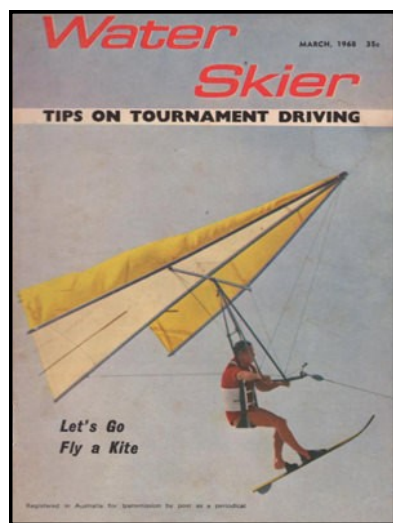
south whenever the wind blew nor-east, each of them no doubt swearing to keep Aussie Pipe a secret and yet the numbers inexorably grew.



*Rolf 'Rotten' Meyer started surfing at Port Kembla, moved to Cole-dale where he was a regular at Headlands and Sandon Point, then became a heavy presence at Cronulla Point - visitors beware! Rolf, at left, starred in Pipe's first photo spread: Surfabout, January, 1967. The photos were taken earlier in 1966.*

In 1968 Steve was eighteen years old, he was surfing perfect waves and funding his missions with shaping and glassing work. Sometimes at Gordon and Smith and sometimes under his own label, Sybernaut. While Bob McTavish, Nat Young, and Midget Farrelly were revolutionising shortboards and incorporating bottom vee, Steve was running early experiments on bottom rocker and foil. Water could flow in unexpected ways and that was key. That same year Steve met a guy who'd be integral to the next phase of his life - though at the time neither of them would know it.

"I was surfing the left at Sandon Point and got talking to a guy who just came out and said, 'You oughta come and make boards for me!'" And Steve promptly did. The guy was Colin 'Biggsy' Ashford, a surfer from Stanwell Park who once had a shaping bay at Stanwell Tops, near Bald Hill, but had recently moved to Wollongong. They produced boards under Biggsy's label, Collins, and because Steve had a bunch of rice paper decals they continued his Sybernauts too.



Surfboards, however, weren't part of Steve Cohen's second act. Work was slow during winter so Biggsy and Steve put their spare materials to use and got their kicks water-skiing behind a fibre-glass boat they built. "It was called *Wrinkle E. Dick* - that's how long we'd spend in the water." Improbable as it sounds, it was behind a hand built boat called *Wrinkle E. Dick* that Steve Cohen became an aviation pioneer.

In the late-50s and early 60s, NASA experimented with a flexible wing as a recovery method for satellites returning from space. The idea was abandoned for traditional parachutes but the wing, called the Rogallo Wing, was adopted by water skiers as a way of gliding; they'd hold onto the wing in the manner hang gliders do now and lift off at a certain speed. Most people would hold onto the rope and follow the boat but Steve began to let go and take his own

path gliding back down to earth.

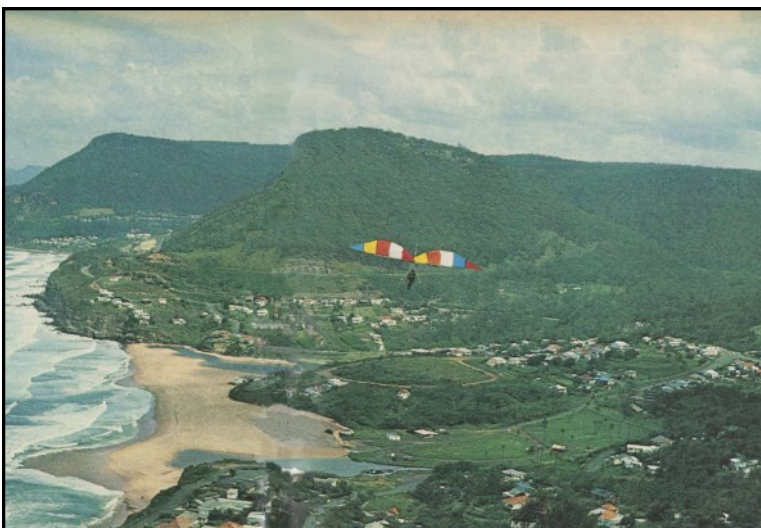
"Steve was clearly excited by the possibilities," recalls Biggsy. "And he was getting a name for himself. I remember once he went out and bought 1,500 feet of rope so he could get more height. We went right up the Shoalhaven River with Steve checking for trees and powerlines, then I got him up on the ski, he took off and up he went. He glided back down to the car park of radio station 2ST who were reporting the stunt." Steve also recalls that flight. "I landed right where the reporter was and I don't know who was more surprised, him or me."

The history of hang gliding is as complex as the history of surfing - every pioneer has their own version. As Steve puts it, the idea of gliding from a hill rather than a boat came to him from a mate called Phil Berg. "Phil told me I should build a bigger wing to fly off the Cronulla sand dunes." It worked, he could steer his homemade wing and control the landing, so like any keen learner he sought bigger challenges. Steve bought a topographic map and again he looked for the gaps - except this time he desired cliffs, not empty coastline.

At 650 metres, Saddleback Mountain is one of the tallest peaks in the Illawarra Escarpment. Despite being heavily wooded the peak was accessible by road, the view looking down on the cleared dairy paddocks of the Jamberoo Valley. It became their new playground. "There was this guy, a local farmer, and when he'd see us up there he'd get out his table and chairs and have cups of tea ready for us when we landed at the bottom."

Not that the farmer would have much time to boil the billy. The longest Steve or anyone in his group would've stayed aloft was ten minutes, and only then in a favourable wind. "It was more like five minutes down. Those old hang gliders flew like a cross between a brick and a crow bar." Also, their pilots hadn't yet discovered the updrafts.

In late 1971 Steve, Ray Ryan, and John Ravelle were driving home from Saddleback when they stopped in at Bald Hill - not far from Biggsy's old Stanwell Tops shaping bay. Steve jumped first. "I just had a little glide down, nothing spectacular." However, the second session yielded wildly different results. "The wind was quite strong. I'd flown in strong winds before, but never such clean air. I took off and just...stayed up." Rather than falling with gravity, they each levitated on the wind pushed vertically by the rim of Bald Hill. The discovery of updrafts was a revelation.



*Steve Cohen soars above Stanwell Park, taken from the august pages of the Women's Weekly. Keen eyes will notice the incredible sand formation at the northern end of the beach.*



“It was beautiful and smooth, and John Ravelle pushed me during that flight. Got me doing 360s, and in the end, instead of flying down to the bottom, we got to land on top of the hill.” Not only were they the first to launch off Bald Hill - they incorrectly thought box kite pioneer Lawrence Hargrave had already made the leap - but it was also the longest continuous flight any of them had made. The fledgling gliders realised that height wasn't everything, that other factors, mostly unseen, were of equal importance. A big mountain without exposure to good wind was the equivalent of a big wave without any shape.

The early hang gliders made no pact for secrecy. What was the point? No amount of brown corduroy could hide the ten yards of coloured sail cloth that made them look like gliding peacocks. People were going to notice, but they assumed the inherent dangers of hang gliding would regulate the numbers. Yet danger be damned, the numbers came. The years 1973 to 1975 were hang gliding's boom years when new spots were flown - including Warriewood and Long Reef on Sydney's northern beaches, both pioneered by Steve - and the numbers swelled at the existing spots.

Gliding captured the public imagination, and the mix of youth and freedom made for paint-by-numbers marketing. Blue Stratos filmed an ad at Bald Hill, Levis and Lee jeans too, and you know that if Red Bull existed in 1973 they would've been neck deep in it. Steve motions me into an adjoining room in the back of his hangar, and there on the wall is a large picture of a hang glider flying into a shimmering red sunset, the colours and visuals faintly recognisable from my childhood. "It's a Coke ad," says Steve as he draws on another rollie. I can vaguely recall the campaign, however the picture has been doctored to remove any commercial association, though it'd be a mistake to retrofit Steve as a lofty anti-capitalist.

For three weeks Steve worked for Moyes Hang Gliders before starting up his own company, Ultra Light Flight Systems, which became Australia's largest manufacturer of hang gliders. He was a prolific designer, inventing the keel pocket, the first great design breakthrough that placed him at the vanguard of innovation. He was also the go to guy for print editors seeking a 'colour' story so he was photographed, interviewed, or contributed an article every other week. The titles include everything from the daily papers, to *Picture* magazine, to the *Women's Weekly*. *Surfing World* and *Tracks* also did stories on Steve, though at that stage they were unaware of his surfing backstory.

Steve's media career peaked in 1975 with *'Birdman'*, an hour long special commissioned by Channel 9 that also ran at the Cannes Film Festival. Among other things it featured a hastily-thought out stunt that saw Steve get lifted 8,000 feet into the air by a hot air balloon before being released... in a stall position. "The glider pitched vertical," says Steve imitating a white knuckle hold on the control bar, "and then *whoom*... it finally came good." He splays his fingers in mock relief. "That one gave me a scare."

When I ask Steve about accidents he shakes his head and says he's been lucky. I take that as declaration he's never had any, yet Steve's youngest brother Arnold - who first leapt off Bald Hill as a spry 13 year old - tells me of a test flight at Stanwell Park that went wrong. "Steve was flying a prototype of the SK-1, a design that would go on to revolutionise the sport because of its handling," says Arnold. "It had a high aspect ratio wing and a long crossbar, and when he was bringing it around to land the frame broke under the force. He fell 80 feet into the lagoon at Stanwell Beach." Steve survived and was largely unhurt, though just a week later he was knocked out cold while fooling around in his hangar.



***Steve flying the SK-1 prototype at Bald Hill (Photo Arnold Cohen)***

Around 1976, Biggsy, who was the fourth or fifth person to jump off Bald Hill, gave up hang gliding to concentrate on other sports. "When the surf got crowded we went water skiing and that led us to hang gliding," says Biggsy, "and we never thought the skies would get crowded. How could they? Yet before long there'd be 40 or 50 people up there."

A similar measure of discontent was welling in Steve - an old pattern re-emerging. Though he also maintains his changing feelings stemmed as much from the encroaching commercialisation of hang gliding as the crowds. Competition formats started being devised, lucrative prize money was offered and it heightened the risk in an already dangerous sport. "Hang gliders were getting pushed past what their operators were capable of." It was a unique stance for a guy who always pushed the limits himself, the first guy to do a positive G loop in a hang glider, and whose gliders placed first and second in the first world championship. He could've benefitted if he stuck around, yet he didn't. Restlessness struck again. In 1978 Steve unhitched himself from the hang gliding subculture that he founded and that in turn revered him. He took his last jump at Bald Hill and he's never been back.

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*A 1976 flyer for Ultra Light Flight Systems.*



**Photo Arnold Cohen**

Screenwriters usually split their stories into three acts. If we're to overlay that template onto The Adventurous Life of Steve Cohen, then the third act - after surfing and hang gliding - involves engines. Small engines attached to glider-like wings - what's known as ultralights now.

Though it sounds like a marketing slogan, when an engine is attached to a glider the pilot experiences another kind of freedom. Not only had Steve Cohen uncoupled himself from the dirt tracks of terra firma, but he was no longer reliant on updrafts either. He was now free to roam utterly uninhibited, and more freedom obviously meant more fun.

"I was out flying along the coast one day," says Steve, "and I saw a friend of mine, Trevor Stevens, surfing Headlands." Favoured by body-boarders, Headlands is a radically jacking ledge that breaks below the crest of the escarpment near Coledale. "So I swung out real low then came in behind a wave so he couldn't see me and gave him a real buzz. I heard the thwack as I went overhead and he lifted his body board to hit my wheel."



### ***The Stolaero - the name stands for Short Take Off and Landing - that hangs in the Powerhouse Museum***

Just as he did with surfboards and hang gliders, Steve began designing ultralights with immediate success - a model of his first production design, the Stolaero, hangs in the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. After the Stolaero, came the Condor, then the Avenger, then in 1982 the Thruster - and yes it was named after Simon Anderson's invention. "It was just a perfect name, probably more so than the surfboard - lots of thrust in the engine." Steve's company occupied space out the back of Gordon & Smith surfboards at Taren Point, so while hydro Thrusters sold out the front, aero Thrusters sold out the back.



### ***Thruster T85SG . Holbrook Ultralight Club***

Steve Cohen was now 'surfing in three dimensions', yet the story I tell lacks that kind of scope. Parts of it, however, need to be further addressed. The first involves his business partner in the Thruster - "a very good businessman," says Steve with a tight grin - who revealed his business acumen by sidelining Steve, cutting him adrift from the Thruster project and all future profits. Many thousands of Thrusters, equalling many millions of dollars, have been made and are still being made today. The second is a divorce that cost him his comeback project, the Skydart.

Though he'd given up surfing, the surf industry was never far away. Brother Arnold was running Emerald Surfboards and Steve helped on various projects, and later he worked at Manta designing and shaping body-boards during the first body-board boom. The work held some interest - anything involving objects moving through a fluid would - but it simply wasn't where he wanted to be. Five years passed in a heavy languor. Much changed in that time: the bottom fell out of hang gliding while ultra lights became a rich guys hobby.

We'd been talking for two hours straight before Steve asked if I wanted to see any of his planes. "Of course," I responded, and we pressed up and out of our chairs, walked through a door and into his vast hangar. A plane hangs from the ceiling and there are two more on the concrete floor half built with their innards spilling out, while dusty fibreglass moulds for wings and a fuselage are fixed to a wall, meanwhile every flat surface is occupied by a jambalaya of tools, salvaged materials, and unidentified miscellany. If George Greenough flew planes I imagine his garage would look like this.

We then cross over to one of his mates hangars. It's more orderly and it also houses a plane that Steve has built, a white Skydart that I admire from outside and also from within - taking up Steve's offer to sit in the tight cockpit. Up close it's an incredible piece of machinery, nothing exists without a clear function, not a curve in the wing nor instrument on the dash. I know zero about planes, but hey, it's fibreglass, it's smooth, it's performance is dictated by many blended curves. I ask how he feels when he looks at, what I consider, an impressive piece of design.

Expecting pride, I'm surprised by his answer. "All I can see is what can be improved."

***Story reproduced with the author's permission from an article first published on 6 November 2017 in swellnet.com***



## Club Social Workday, 5 Nov



## Kains Curry Night, 18 Nov





# The Missions: Wings, Wheels, & Jazz

**O**n Saturday 11th of November NSW SAC members were invited to “Wings, Wheels, & Jazz” at The Missions Airfield on the Hawkesbury river. The day was a great success with many Club members attending. There was a nice selection of Vintage Aircraft, Vintage Sport Cars, and even a Jazz Band to be enjoyed. Our thanks go to owner Roy Fox for the invitation and for their hospitality.

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