



RAAF Radschool Association Magazine

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Avalon Air Show Special

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Avalon Air Show 2013 - Special Edition



The 12th biennial Airshow (at Avalon) was held over the week 26th Feb to the 3rd March, at the Avalon Air-port, just 20 Kms north of Geelong. The Airshow has been described as the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere and each year it just gets bigger and better.

The History.

Avalon has been involved in Airshows for many years, the first was held back in 1957 when the Government Aircraft Factory, which was building the Canberra at the time, put on a display for its employees. Normally the workers only ever saw individual parts of an aircraft, so as a PR exercise, management decided to mount a flying display at Avalon so the employees could see the final result of their work.



After that, things were quiet for quite a while, then in 1988 the members of the [Schofields Flying Club](#) (Schofields, near Rouse Hill, was built by the RAAF during WW2 as an alternate for Richmond) decided to celebrate the Australian Bicentenary by holding a major Airshow. The Club had been holding smaller Airshows at the Schofields airport but it was considered too small for a major event so negotiations were held and it was agreed to hold it at the base at Richmond.

Invitations went out and the organisers were able to entice such aircraft as the F-15 Eagle, Panavia Tornado F3, Sea Harrier, Lockheed C-5 Galaxy and the BAe Hawk to the show as well as a flypast by a Boeing B-52 Stratofortress bomber and demonstrations by the Royal New Zealand Air Force aerobatic team "Kiwi Red".

The 88 show was a success and in 1991, it was decided to hold a second show at Richmond, this time to celebrate the RAAF's 70th anniversary. It also was hugely popular with the public.

By now the Schofields Club was winding down and the Airshow events were getting too big so it was decided to create a body to exclusively run future Airshows - Airshows DownUnder (ASDU) was formed.



Richmond, being an operational Base, was not the ideal place to hold regular public events so an alternate airport was sought and it was decided to "take the show on the road" and hold it at various airports around the country. Avalon Airport, situated not far from Melbourne and only 20 Kms from Geelong which offered plenty of accommodation for participants and the public alike, was an ideal choice for the first show outside Richmond.

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The first Airshow to be held at Avalon was in October in 1992, but Melbourne, being Melbourne, turned on the wettest spring in its history and it was nearly decided to cancel the event all together. But, being Melbourne, the Gods smiled on the organisers and it stopped raining just before opening day and the show went ahead and many thousands of people braved the elements and turned up over the 2 public days.

Normally the show would have been hugely successful, with 226 exhibitors from 12 countries but the adverse weather caused a financial headache for the organisers and the proposed plan to take the show "On the Road" was shelved.

The organisers decided to try again in 1995, but this time the timing was changed to March to take advantage of the dryer climate during autumn. That year the Russians stole the show with Anatoly Kvochur, arguably Russia's best ever pilot, tossing his [Su-27P "Flanker"](#) around like it was a Pitts. On the Sunday, he flew the Flanker down the Avalon runway at approximately 15 feet AGL. Neither the RAAF nor the USAF could or would compete with him and he easily won the award for the best flying display.



In 1997 the show was held in February, but this time Melbourne turned on the hottest February ever and the organisers must have wondered who or what they had run over. 172,000 people slip, slop, slapped and made their way to Avalon to see the numerous displays and exotic aircraft from a number of countries. The RAAF's F111 did the 'Dump and Burn" during the night show – always a great hit with the public and 97 was the first time the Super Connie, recently restored by HARS, made its public appearance. By now the accountants had got into the picture and it was calculated that the show had brought \$63 million into the Victorian economy – something that the Vic Government could not ignore and which gave the organisers a substantial bargaining chip.

In 1999 the show was starting to be noticed on the world stage and it attracted 472 exhibitors from 26 countries. The then Premier, Jeff Kennett, opened the show on the 16th February as by then it had been decided, with perhaps a little persuasion from the Vic Gov't, that all future shows would be held at Avalon, and the timing would remain end Feb, early March.

2001 was the 100th anniversary of Federation in Australia and also the 80th anniversary of the RAAF and as the millennium bug had not ruined the whole world, it was time for a celebration. This time the USAF were determined to put on a show and over 100 USAF pilots took part, flying such diverse aircraft as the B1 bomber, F15 Eagle, F16 Falcon, B52 Bomber and the C-17 Globemaster. The Mother Country was also there in force with their Nimrod, Tornado GR1, Vickers VC10 Tanker, C130, and the Eurocopter Tiger. It was also the last public performance of the RAAF's Machi which went into the back shed soon after.

The theme for the 2003 show "*Celebrating the Centenary of Powered Flight*", commemorating the first powered flight by the Wright brothers on 17 December 1903 at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina – about the same time that John Gleeson learnt to fly. There were 440 exhibitors from 30 countries as well as more than six hundred aircraft on the field, including replicas from the early 20th century, such as a 1910 [Hanriot](#) and 1911 [Curtiss Model D](#).

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By now themes had crept into the planning and 2005 was "*The Shape of Things to Come*." The show was now a true global event and the aviation business world came to realise its huge potential. More than 500 exhibitors from 22 countries took part in the show with the organisers holding 11 major conferences.



The week-long event also increased Geelong's economy by \$15.6 million – it could not be allowed to leave Avalon.

The theme of the 2007 air show, held between 20 and 25 March, was "*Breaking the Barriers*", as it was the 60th anniversary of the breaking of the sound barrier by Charles "Chuck" Yeager. Yeager himself was the guest of honour at the show, and a full-scale mockup of the Bell X-1 was specially constructed. Nearly 183,000 people saw the number of exhibitor companies increase to 611 from 20 countries and were able to check out 457 aircraft on the ground. 2007 was also the 60th anniversary of the forming of the USAF and they were very well represented.

The accountants reckoned the show injected \$120 million into the Victorian economy.

The 2009 air show was held from 10th to 15th March. Trade sessions ran from Tuesday until 2 pm Friday, after which it was opened to the public until the close on Sunday afternoon. The theme was "*Towards Tomorrow*" and Andy Thomas, an Australian-born astronaut, was the guest of honour. It was also the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing and the Airshow 'swan song' for the mighty F111 which was retired in December 2010. That year the show attracted 170,000 people but the numbers were kept a bit low due to Melbourne's finicky weather – on the Sunday an uninvited Aeolus got into the act and several tents and temporary structures were blown away and many visiting aircraft were extensively damaged.

That year, 562 exhibitors took part and despite the weather, the attendance numbers exceeded 170,000. The accountants estimated the 2009 Airshow boosted the Victorian economy by \$121 million and as a result the Vic Government agreed with the organisers to have the Airshow at Avalon until 2015.

2011 was the 90th anniversary of the RAAF and they were there in numbers. It was also the centenary of the first passenger flight in Australia. The USAF brought the F22 and a near perfect model of the F32 to the show and the C-27, the long awaited replacement for the old Caribou was also in attendance. The Gods smiled on the event, the weather was perfect and

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more than 195,000 people made the journey down Geelong Rd to the event (see more details on the 2011 show [HERE](#)).

The 2013 event looked like it was going to be a repeat of 1992. A flash storm came through the airfield and dumped nearly an inch of rain in an hour turning the place into Lake Avalon. Lightning struck the Control Tower putting all the airport's comms and nav aids out of action for some time. Loads of gravel were trucked in and dumped into hollows and duck boards were laid to enable people to walk around on dry land. But, when things looked dire, out came the sun, things dried up and the show went ahead as if nothing has happened.

Once again, the number of participating exhibitors was greater than in previous years, confirming the event as a major aviation business exhibition in the eyes of the world – 601 this year compared to 575 in 2011. But, unfortunately, the spectator numbers were down on the 2011 show. While a lot of soul searching will result in a just as many reasons why this is so, we feel there are two evidential reasons, firstly the 2011 event was the 80th anniversary of the RAAF and was promoted as such (the RAAF is a great crowd puller) and secondly the terrible weather on the days leading to the public days would surely have turned many away.



There were almost 168,000 people through the gates over the full 6 days, compared to 195,000 people in 2011.

Planning is already underway for Avalon 2015. This will be a very special show as it will commemorate the Anzac centenary and will pay aviation homage to a century of service by Australians in the defence of the Nation.

Now, if only they could control the weather.....

(Most of the pics have been “crunched” to make them load quicker, you can click a lot of them to see bigger and clearer copies.)