

BOY, WHAT A RIDE



I first heard about my Super Cub about 5 years before I got it. Someone told me there was an old venison recovery cub sitting under a woolshed - they said the wings were ok but the rest was had it. Rumors were the owner thought it was worth a big pile of money, more than anyone would spend. Roll forward to 3 years later and a chance meeting with another Super Cub owner Bruce. I asked if he wanted to sell his cub ... I can't print the reply! But he also told me about this old cub in a shed in Southland. I said I knew about it but that it was in very bad condition, however luckily Bruce put me straight and I organised to meet the owner for a look (I was told it was not for sale but could look anyway). There was much excitement in our house talking about what it might look like and whether he might part with it. The day arrived when I drove to the tiny town of Riversdale at the bottom of the South Island for a look, and there she was.... even with the wings off you could see that she wasn't finished flying! I wanted to hop in and make childish aircraft noises but held back trying to seem like I wasn't too interested. Over a coffee and lunch there was a handshake and a promise I would look after her. I was buzzing on the 2-hour commercial trip back, trying to work out how to get my new purchase home. It involved a 15-hour drive and a 3 hour ferry trip each way with a trailer (large) and a family (willing). We had a great trip down and it was a dream coming true for me. Loading up was very exciting, but a sad day for the previous owner.



Home at last and the beginning of a year and a half rebuild. Wings were recovered with us doing the donkeywork and our very capable aircraft engineer providing the expertise. Many hours were spent researching Supercub.org for the best mods for my baby, as I had big plans. At the same time I started researching the history of our new cub....



Starting life new into New Zealand in 1957 she was fitted with a hopper and spent 3000

hours (until Nov 1963) spreading fertilizer around the Hawkes Bay district, with just the one reportable crash (into a fence). You would think that she could now retire and tow gliders from nice flat paddocks with short grass and gentle pilots. She must have thought this as well as a stint towing was next on the list.



But then it happened ... Some clever bloke decided a Supercub would be a great way of getting deer carcasses out of the rugged New Zealand backcountry. The robust nature of the cub and the fact that it would gently collapse around you in a prang were appealing to the budding pilot. A chapter of which I am very passionate about began for poor old BOY. First up was a loan to a hunter/pilot on the West Coast. Imagine the shock coming out of glider towing to having 6 or more smelly, bloody deer carcasses jammed in behind the pilot's seat and operating from some of the roughest places you could land an aircraft...

Work continued on the rebuild with the paint removed and the aircraft stripped back to basics. We chose to repaint her as she had been when new. We fitted a 160 hp engine out of a Robinson helicopter and did 31 other mods to make her even more backcountry capable. As the day of test flying drew nearer I was finding out more and more about the venison recovery era using aircraft. On her first hire to a venison pilot in 1967 she got the safety landing gear cables caught up in some long grass. The wise pilot elected to quickly tip upside down! Never mind, with a spare prop and strut carried in on foot a couple of days later she was tipped back over and flown out for repairs. Back together and on the market again she was lucky enough to meet Tony and Marion Hawker...

The big day arrived and after a rest of 6 years she was back in the air and starting training (me not her). Flying an aircraft that has a center seat and a stick is a joy, the visibility is awesome - unless you are taxing!

Bushwheels were next and then the fun started, quite a bit of upper air work, what the stall feels like, how it develops and how to arrest it, fly right on the edge of it then back to the circuit. All the while reading Supercub.org and getting other pilot's opinions on how to land short. There is some very good advise available, and for me a better understanding of flight in general. A wealth of knowledge out there for the taking...

1968 and BOY is in the venison game, flat out! Working with a husband and wife team with two cubs, both Tony and Marion Hawker flying into the bush and hunting red deer, whitebaiting and having all sorts of wild adventures. One sad day BOY and Tony had a woopsie that ended with a long walk out of the mountains for Tony, and a long trip on the trailer for the cub back to Airwork in Christchurch for another rebuild. At this stage all the electrics were removed including starter and generator (this was done for weight saving as

all the electrics weighed the same as a deer).

The thought of flying into the NZ backcountry in my new/old cub was compelling, so I started training harder - first just spot landings no brakes, spot after spot after spot, then making my practice strip shorter and shorter, always pushing myself to be consistent and fly in different winds. I was starting to get a bit cocky so went and landed on a 4WD track. It was a fairly short, tricky approach and had big ditches on either side, with only a foot to spare either side of the tyres. After the third look I touched down, left brake locked, right brake locked, both brakes locked and stop!!



While I had landed ok I was happy to admit I needed more time in the seat before going into these tight places again. Back to the circuit, then the beach, some off camber landings and landing around corners, then riverbeds, then water, I have done quite a lot of water/river beach landings in the C185, but the cub feels very different. The 185 has so much more energy, and when you close the throttle only the noise changes! Whereas the Cub will slow dramatically! More refining of technique, trying different ideas inside a 50 meter mown strip but I couldn't quite get it right. Every time I landed I was in a different place - although not by a lot. I had hit a barrier and could not seem to get any better. Anyway, after many frustrating landings I finally found the formula! NO I won't tell you what it is!!

And then it happened, a chance meeting with Craig Anderson of Sounds Aero Maintenance. I knew of him and his crazy Piper Pacer but had not yet met him. We talked about backcountry landings and he mentioned the Omaka Healthy Bastards Bushpilot competition. Now I had another goal.

My dream of hunting in the backcountry was coming true. We were shooting a few deer and carting meat out and generally having a very nostalgic time...

BOY was rebuilt again around mid 1969. She once again was purchased by a venison hunter and was back in the game working for Sou'west Venison, based initially in Makarora (a hunting, fishing, flying mecca). BOY was smashing sandflies and flying meat out of the hills for the resident hunters.



Flown by Graham Allan as a paid pilot, BOY must have made a good impression as Graham brought her to continue carting venison on his own account. Due to the allegations of poaching deer he decided to paint BOY an unusual colour so he could not

be accused of wrong doing.



This proved to be a long relationship with Graham or his estate keeping BOY until I turned up in May 2010 – some 40 years!

So with the Healthy Bastards Bushpilot competition looming, a bit more practice and I was starting to feel ok about my results. On the way to the event we had to make a wee detour to burn off a bit of extra fuel. Landing on a beautiful beach in the Marlborough Sounds did the trick and we were light and ready to go the next day. I was lucky to win my class by a very small margin over another couple of cubs and the Pacer. That night Craig suggested we do some bush flying and the rest is a story in the making...

I know there are a lot of adventures left in BOY yet, and with my son Jack going solo in her on his 16th birthday, I'm pretty sure I could see her rolling her eyes!

Nigel Griffith

Latest owner of PA18A ZK-BOY