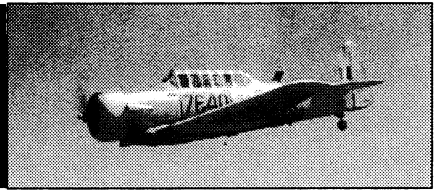


OTHER PASSIONS...

Ron Lawford takes us to the skies



Ron Lawford is the sole practitioner from Jingili with the intriguing letterhead featuring a drawing of something that looks like a cross between a kite and the space shuttle. It is in fact a *Rutan Longez* aeroplane and Darwin residents became familiar with seeing it skimming through the skies above Casuarina and Vestey's Beach on weekends between 1986 and 1999.

At the controls was Ron Lawford and *Balance* spoke to him recently to find out more. "I decided about the aeroplane in 1981 and went over to Oshkosh, which is the mecca for people interested in such things and I bought one in kit form. It turned up as big blocks of white foam and blue foam, red foam and bottles of epoxy resin and so forth. I started building it in 1983 under my house where my legal office now is. It took just under three years and about six thousand hours to complete."

The aircraft has been decommissioned now and its new home is the Darwin Aviation Museum along with one of Ron's earlier aeroplanes, a *Skycraft Scout*. "The scout" he says "is one of the very first ultra lights in Australia. Mine was number nineteen off the production line and when it was in action flew at nineteen knots powered by a 4.5 horsepower engine, which is similar to a victa lawn mower engine. It had a little propellor and no instruments whatsoever. I bought it in 1976 and it came in a cardboard box. I just stuck the wings and tail on and started the engine and it took off and flew. In hindsight it was underpowered for the air. The highest it got was sixty feet. But it was great fun to float around the wetlands where the old rice farm used to be at Humpty Doo and to be able to fly at ten feet watching the buffalo."

Flying is a passion for Ron. He has been involved with aviation since the age of fourteen when he joined the Air training Corps. This led to a flying scholarship and the RAAF in 1958. He was in Darwin in the early 1960's flying *Dakotas* and *Vampires*. His pilots log book shows that he has spent 15,000 hours in the air as a pilot. No mean feat.



These days Ron combines flying with legal practise. He still holds a commercial pilots licence and is qualified to instruct at many levels including aerobatics. These days he describes himself as an aviation lawyer and estimates that half of his legal practise involves flying and aircraft in some shape or form, mostly in matters coming before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal involving the Civil Aviation Safety Authority or advising in respect of commercial documents to do with the purchase or lease of aircraft. But law will never totally supplant flying in Ron's life. "Flying is a release from the pressures of legal practice. It is a totally different ball game. There is no physical risk in the law unless you get belted up by an irate client. But in flying you always have to be aware that things that can go wrong. There is a different mind set to practising the law. There is nothing to compare with the view from the cockpit when you can fly from 10,000 feet above the ground or down to 500 feet or even 10 feet if there is a good reason to do it. I never tire of looking at the cloud scapes or

down to the ground where I can see all sort of things which the average Australian just does not see."

Ron describes himself as both an open cockpit pilot and a modern one. His latest aircraft is a RV6 which is equipped with all the latest computer gismos and global positioning systems. But at heart one can't help but think that Ron's heart is more in a world of wooden struts and ailerons and the romance of early aviation. Apart from the RV6 which is set up for long haul flying he has been flying a *Harvard* of late. "The *Harvard* is lots more fun to fly. It was designed before World War Two and was the advanced trainer of the war. Its got a big engine and makes lots of smoke when you start it up. But it would be hard work flying one of those to Perth."

Another time and another place for Ron Lawford? "Definitely the period from 1935 to 1950. That was a fascinating period. A period of rapid change. Pilots went from flying craft made of canvas and wood to flying supersonic jets in a period of just fifteen years. And of course during World War Two there were all sorts of interesting aeroplanes. I think if I could be guaranteed survival I would go back and fly then!" And the ultimate aeroplane? "The spitfire, of course. I'm still working on flying a spitfire."

