

South Island Akro Fest 28 November – 2 December 2024

New Zealand Aerobatic Club Report



This year's South Island Akro Fest was an exciting, successful and safe event with a record number of pilots competing at Ashburton Aerodrome 28-30 November 2024.

Supported by the New Zealand Aerobatic Club, Warbirds Association and hosted by Mid-Canterbury Aeroclub, 15 pilots competed over the Primary, Recreational, Sportsman, Intermediate, Unlimited and Vintage categories.

Competitors and aircraft began arriving from Sunday 24 November, those travelling from the North Island were able to take advantage of good weather windows. The Alpha from South Canterbury Aero Club ZK – VCA was made available for entirety of the contest, which the competitors were very grateful for.



This year attracted plenty of positive public interest as the practice days commenced and planes could be heard whirling around the sky. Pilots offered warm greetings to visitors and made those arriving feel welcome at the aerodrome. Robyn, daughter of Ron McDougall was in awe when she was able to have a photo with the plane, Pitts S-1S ZK-FRJ, that her father flew when she was young. Her and her partner, Gary, continued to return to the event throughout the week to enjoy seeing FRJ being flown.

Monday's excellent weather allowed perfect conditions for those itching to practice. Box markers were installed and the competition was taking form. Lincoln Jones arrived from Fielding and he and Andy Love took the Pitts, ZK-LDJ and ZK-PUG, out for formation practice. It was spectacular to see the duo split neatly on downwind while I joined overhead.

Tuesday began slowly as presence of low cloud delayed any opportunity for travellers transiting and for practice in the box. The formation fanatics took the opportunity for another flight, this time Ross Brodie joined in the Air Tourer ZK-DAC. It is exciting and encouraging to see skilled pilots perform in areas of aviation that are unfamiliar to a newcomer such as myself. The briefing and de-briefing



allowed a sneak peek into formation flying and the guys working together as a team.

Wednesday started off with the Event Organiser/Contest Director and three other competitors, detouring to Ashburton via the Rakaia Gorge. The scenic trip illustrated that the clouds offered some reprieve towards the ranges, however; as the morning progressed, the clouds quickly decided to smother the blue sky. By the time the briefing was complete, pilots and planes were ready, it was overcast.

Debutante competitor, Willian Siakifilo discovered that the Rakaia Gorge still evaded the grey and he was able to practice over Lake Coleridge while I practiced downstream at Snowden. The clouds continued seeping into the gorge and as we were transiting back to Ashburton, we could hear Pierre Pechon entering the Ashburton CFZ flying Super Decathlon ZK-REF from Fielding.

The weather significantly improved throughout the day and the box became active for practice. For some of the newbies it was the first time they were able to orientate themselves in the aerobatic box and prepare for the days to follow. We were graced with beautiful weather well into the evening.



On Thursday 28 November the 8am briefing had the competitors, volunteers and guests focus again on safety and procedures of the event before Russell Bell, flying Giles-200 ZK-LGT, started the day competing in the Unlimited category. It was evident during his safety manoeuvres that there was

significant wind coming off the ranges. Russell's flying is always enjoyable to watch and seems to have a magical component that obliterates understanding.



The day progressed at good pace, with thanks to Cathy Heslin for her assistance as starter. Unlimited, Intermediate and Sportsman categories were flown followed by a break for lunch. The intermediate category was contested by Richard Button flying Pitts S-1S ZK – FRJ, Lachlan Falconer flying Yak-52 ZK-AMD and Lincoln Jones flying Pitts S-2C ZK-LDJ. Unfortunately, Lincoln Jones added an extra 180 degrees to his 3rd manoeuvre, resulting in hard zeros for the remainder of his flight. A level of empathy from the other competitors was humorously evident as those who have done the same

sympathised, and those who haven't know they probably will at some stage.



Lachlan Falconer made a long-awaited return to competitive aerobatics having a great time pushing the Yak through a challenging sequence for the aircraft. It was excellent to see him in the pilot's seat again. Richard Button was on form in the Pitts and demonstrated that currency is key, flying a tidy sequence.



The afternoon included a mixture of Primary and Recreational categories to optimise the use of shared aircraft and safety pilots. Ground conditions were challenging, although the aerobatic box remained mostly smooth. Due to the wind, the decision was made to postpone Vintage.



Three competitors entered South Island Akro Fest as debutantes, we welcomed Holly Lyttle, Corin Miller, and Willian Siakifilo. They all experienced their first competitive flight in challenging conditions, making use of South Canterbury Aero Club's Alpha 2160a ZK-VCA in the Primary Category.

Holly Lyttle is a C Category instructor based at South Canterbury Aero Club and has joined the YAK-52 ZK-ADM syndicate which will be an excellent aircraft to progress her aerobatics in. She has been drawn into aerobatics and is a focused and diligent learner, no doubt she is one to watch.



For a first-time competitor flying solo, Corin Miller completed the Primary sequence well and cruised through the procedures which can be quite daunting, especially for a first flight. With his first competitive solo flight achieved, it will be great to see where aerobatics takes him. He is unable to attend Nationals in March next year due to travel to Antarctica, and we hope he will return to Akro Fest next year.



Will Siakifilo, local dairy farmer, completed in Primary and also competed in the Recreational Category flying the Air Tourer ZK -VCA. Will achieved his first and second competitive flight within a couple of hours, in two different aircraft. Don't let his cheery smile fool you, he was competing to win.

Welcome to Zac Ashley who attended South Island Akro Fest for the first time and has previously attended Flying New Zealand competitions. Zac flew in the Sportsman Category, flying Air Tourer ZK-DAC, and his experience competing was clear as he remained as cool as a cucumber throughout the whole event.



We look forward to seeing these competitors return for future events and wish them all the best.

Dinner at the Phat Duck on Thursday night was an enjoyable way to socialise and unwind at the end of a busy day with plenty of enthusiasm remaining.

The anticipation of competitive flight on Friday was tangible, and the clouds decided they would make the first appearance in the aerobatic box, at approximately 2500 feet. Relentlessly, they continued performing well into the afternoon, and finally cleared for the competition to begin at



2:30pm. While the wind was a challenge on Wednesday, visibility was a challenge on Thursday as the Canterbury haze allowed the helpful orientation of the mountains and the ocean to hide in a single continuous blur.

The flight order progressed similarly to the previous day, with the addition of the Vintage Category which returned to Akro Fest for the first time in many years.

Andy Love competed in Tiger Moth ZK-BAA and Ross Brodie in Tiger ZK-BRL as they mesmerizingly battled with the grace only a Tiger Moth can perform. The Vintage Category is unique to South Island Akro Fest which requires entrants to fly a pre-1960 taildragger with no inverted fuel or oil. A joyful category to watch and fly, which we hope remains on the line up in years to come.



The Sportsman category was packed this year with six pilots in the category.

Ross Brodie, who was also as the contest's technical inspector, competed in Sportsman flying the Air Tourer ZK-DAC, as well as in the Vintage Category, 4 Minute Free Style – a well-seasoned Akro Fest attendant who flew very well in all categories.



Iain MacPhail, flew Air Tourer ZK-DAC in Sportsman and was also competing in Alpha 2160a ZK-VCA in Recreational. His performance in Sportsman illustrated the hard work he has been doing to progress his flying.

Mike Fowler, flying Yak 52 ZK-ADM, was back to beat up the skies after an injury in March and, as usual, his persuasion and care for the Yak was evident.





Pierre Pechon, flying red Super Decathlon ZK-REF, performed precisely throughout the competition.

John McCallister made a return to competitive aerobatics, flying Alpha 2160a ZK-VCA. He was warmly welcomed back to the scene of competitive flying and was able to offer very helpful tips to newcomers, myself included.



Brendon Wellington returned to his second South Island Akro Fest as part of the Yak-52 syndicate, ZK- ADM, flying well in the Recreational Category.

Flights were completed into the evening and promptly concluded at 8pm, followed by an exceptional barbeque thanks to Mid-Canterbury Aeroclub.

Saturday morning deceptively offered an incredibly clear start to the day which created a false sense of hope that competitors would complete their third flight of the competition. Low cloud arrived from both the coast and inland, settling solidly until mid-afternoon.

It was great to see the public arrive in droves to investigate the happenings, and the Young Eagles from Canterbury Aero Club, South Canterbury Aeroclub, the cadets from the 24th Squadron Air Traffic Control and local Army Cadets arrived and were taken for a tour of the Cessna 152 Aerobat, Yak 52, Super Decathlon and Pitts S-2C. I personally enjoyed seeing the teenagers and their parents jump in the plane and have a go at the controls and realise it is a simple car like machine with wings. They found it hard to believe that a Cessna was able to go upside down, and I reassured them that as a training plane it was very stable, and especially kind and predictable. It was certainly a contrasting design to the nearby Pitts, Giles and Yak.



The cloud ascended to 3000 feet after lunch and those present at the Ashburton aerodrome enjoyed the Tiger Moth duo Andy Love in Tiger Moth ZK-BAA and Ross Brodie in Tiger ZK-BRL take some of the volunteers, starter Cathy Heslan and photographer Nikki Franklin for a formation flight. The

ladies grinned as they landed, both passengers appreciated the skill of the pilots and the sheer joy of flying in vintage aircraft.

The 4 Minute Freestyle was completed after lunch and the pilot's creativity was unreservedly illustrated as the manoeuvres performed didn't require to adhere to the standard competitive Aresti system. Ross Brodie gracefully performed a falling leaf and flat turns in Tiger Moth ZK-BRL, the Yak 52 was again pushed by Falconer ZK-ADM who enjoyed his flight –another post-flight grinner. Smoke on for Andy Love in Pitts S-1S ZK-PUG and Lincoln Jones Pitts S-2C ZK-LDJ which is always striking to see.



As forecast, the clouds cleared later in the day as the competition finished and clean up was underway to allow competitors and guests to arrive at the Awards Dinner at the Lakehouse, Lake Hood. Celebratory drinks were enjoyed on the sun-soaked deck overlooking the water before dinner. Guest speaker, Allen Hogan, who is a founding

member of the New Zealand Aerobatic Club spoke fondly of his flying days, with many interesting stories which included the establishment of the New Zealand Aerobatic Club, and the trip to the World Championships with Pam Collings in 1976 held in Kiev. A fantastic way to celebrate a successful event. Please see the official results for scores and awards.



Sunday began with the final clean up and the key helper, Iain MacPhail, was up early cleaning box markers and assisting pilots departing for travel. Iain positively contributes to every event, not only as a competitor, he jumps in to help wherever needed which is always greatly appreciated.

Special thank you to the Event Organiser and Contest Director Andy Love, as his passion for grass roots aerobatics has significantly boosted the attendance of competitors in the beginner categories.

Thank you to Lachlan Falconer for fulfilling the role of Chief Judge and ensuring competitors appropriately behaved.



A sincere thank you to all who were involved and attended this year's South Island Akro Fest as the various roles generate a successful event; volunteers, judges, starters, technical inspector, spotter, scribes, photographers, data entry administrators, safety pilots, aeroclub members, competitors, T-shirt designers and aircraft owners.

See you all next year.

Unlimited – Power

<i>Pilot</i>	<i>A/c type</i>	<i>Reg</i>	<i>Known</i>	<i>Free/F Known</i>	<i>U/Known</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Russell Bell	Giles G200	ZK-LGT	3048.2	3962.0		7010.2	75.80%

4 Minute Free Style

<i>Pilot</i>	<i>A/c type</i>	<i>Reg</i>	<i>Known</i>	<i>Free/F Known</i>	<i>U/Known</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Ross Brodie	DH-82a	ZK-BRL				3540.0	88.5
Andy Love	Pitts S-1S	ZK-PUG				3490.0	87.3
Lachlan Falconer	Yak 52	ZK-ADM				3060.0	76.5
Lincoln Jones	Pitts S-2C	ZK-LDJ				2906.0	72.5

Most Improved Pilot

Gill Phillips Alpha / C-150A

People's Choice

Yak 52 ZK-ADM

Best newcomer

William Siakifilo Alpha / Air Tourer

Highest Scoring Biplane (Rangitata Island Trophy)

<i>Pilot</i>	<i>A/c type</i>	<i>Reg</i>	<i>Known</i>	<i>Free/F Known</i>	<i>U/Known</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Ross Brodie	DH-82a	ZK-BRL					85.80
Andy Love	DH-82a	ZK-BAA					84.20
Richard Button	Pitts S-1S	ZK-FRJ					83.75

Dipstick

John McCallister for delaying the Alpha flights by misplacing the fuel card, which was later found in his wallet.