

## A first flight appraisal from NZ Aviation News

### First impressions count – the French connection

*Avions Robin promote performance when it comes to extolling the virtues of their range of general aviation aircraft.*

*They should also promote the enjoyment factor for flying, once again, is fun with European flair*

*Aviation News spent a day in the sun with the Izard Pacific team as they got up to speed with their new aircraft.*

**I**zard Pacific Aviation assembled and took delivery of the first examples of Robin aircraft to be seen in the country during the final days of February.

Arriving in the big box at Hamilton Aero Maintenance for assembly were a Robin 2160 and a DR 500/200i President. Both aircraft effectively represent the range of trainers and cross country performers offered by the French manufacturer. Refer to the Dec2000/Jan2001 issue of *Aviation News* for a development history for the Robin series.

While test flights and ratings had been conducted in France the process required repeating in New Zealand and a mid summer's day at Matamata amid the gliding,

parachuting and general club flying offered an opportunity to fly the aircraft, de-brief, shoot the photos and return to Izard Pacific's northern base of Springhill.

While Izard Pacific principal Richard Izard and manager Steve Lange were pilots in command it was the experience and expertise of Harry Scott from Tauranga, from over the hill, who offered first hand

impressions of a pair of European sports aircraft ready to offer pilots something different to the offerings of North American manufacturers.

At first glance these aircraft stand out and are different to the line up of Cessnas and Pipers normally seen on airfields. The hot summer sun while, offering shade for the Cessnas, beat mercilessly into the Piper cockpits and the Robins were to sit it out with their large forward sliding canopies open to catch any vestige of breeze. Surprisingly their cockpits remained relatively cool and when taxiing the cockpit canopy could be left cracked open until take off.

As there are no doors entry for both aircraft is from the trailing edge of the wing and step down into armchair comfort. The R2160 has a fuselage mounted step to assist stepping onto the wing but the DR500 President lacks this feature and the step up to the wing is initially challenging. Well placed hand holds are ready to grab though.

Harry Scott ran through an *Aviation News* checklist at



*Robin offers a quality product with its R2160 which has proven itself on the training flightline.*



*Simple effective cockpit with dual throttles and no plastic trim save the centre console.*

the conclusion of each type rating sequence and noted the following for the R2160.

“Seat position is readily and easily adjustable. Good provision of instrument panel handholds to support the pilot and passenger.

The cockpit is well laid out with attention to seating and items which the pilot wishes to use regularly all neatly to hand. A top of panel annunciator

display is common to all aircraft in the Robin range.

Start sequence is typical Lycoming 0-320. Fuel control is readily located on a console below the instrument panel between the seats

Trim and flap operations fall readily to hand. A feature of the aircraft is that very little trim change is required as flap extends.

Taxiing the aircraft requires attention. Light pressure on the brakes is all that *Note the offset nose leg and clean one piece wheel pants.*



that is required. The aircraft will manoeuvre in tight spaces on the ground due to the effective differential braking.

Take off offers no unexpected surprises. The aircraft doesn't accelerate startlingly but progresses smoothly and flies to the numbers laid down in the manual.

In cruise this is pure heaven, relatively quiet as there is a lot of perspex, visibility over the nose, to the side and overhead is the aircraft's key feature. Stick control offers better leverage for pilot input and this is particularly important when demonstrating its aerobatic capability."

The day saw first loops, aileron rolls, barrel rolls and stall turns. This was a purely exploratory series of manoeuvres but there is no doubt the aircraft is a capable aerobatic trainer. Power available is adequate for what needs to be achieved. Spins are approved but weren't carried out during this appraisal.

Stall responses are classic and speeds are as the manual lays down. With full flap extended a wing drop stall is readily achieved.

Controls remain effective at touchdown speeds and with all that visibility Harry speaks highly of the orientation of pilot to round out attitude. Full flap go arounds are within the aircraft's capability.

Overall, with only a couple of hours in the aircraft initial impressions are that this is a delightful aircraft to fly. It



*Smoothed off cowlings and wheel pants are features along with the sharp spinner. Superb all round visibility is a feature not only for aerobatics but when in the circuit.*

appears strong and robust, has superb visibility which enhances its usefulness as an aerobatic trainer. European training schools and the Sydney aerobatic school know they have a winner and the long service of the aircraft from these institutions adds to its CV.

For a new general purpose trainer and smart cross country cruiser on the line the R2160 will take offer some serious thought.

## DR500/200I President

*Production of the externally similar DR-400 series actually began in 1972. The DR-500 President is the latest luxury version*

**H**ere is a top of the line intercontinental cross country cruiser. Its purpose in life is to go from A to B with minimum fuss and deliver its load refreshed and eager to fly again.

A traditional Robin product of composite/wooden airframe and wing construction with Jodel ancestry coupled to Lycoming dependability and the latest US avionic packages.

It's a heavier aircraft than the previously mentioned R2160 and naturally can't be thrown around as a lightweight but the 200 hp injected 0-360 Lycoming will push the airframe along at better than 130 knots in pure armchair comfort. All leather trimming in this airframe with no flimsy plastic covers to crack and split. The huge canopy slides easily

forward and when closed offers the occupants an armchair view of all outside. Rear seat room is snug but has adequate foot room and more than enough shoulder room. Behind the rear seats 60 kg of baggage can be stowed, accessed by a



*ZK-TZA has very comprehensive instrument fit including dual GPS receivers.*

*The DR series Robin is a classic and will in years to come still be highly regarded. The predominantly wood/composite airframe with Dacron covering is as durable as its metal cousins with forgiving flying characteristics, good performance and payload attributes which compare well with any of the competition.*

separate port side hatch. Below the baggage rack is the auxiliary fuel tank. There are four fuel tanks comprising two wing root tanks, a central fuselage tank and the auxiliary tank controlled through a simplified management system.

Harry Scott notes that the entry and exit procedure is easier than it looks

The seat adjustment obviates any need for rudder pedal adjustment and the stick control offers full deflection and movement without impinging on the pilot or front seat passenger.

This particular aircraft has a full complement of instruments and avionic fit plus three axis auto pilot. There is little to add to its capability.

### Systems appraisal

Engine start is standard fuel injected Lycoming although the position of the mixture control deviates from US practise in being on the centre console instead of being alongside the throttle and propeller pitch controls.

Taxiing brings no surprises. The short wing enhances the already exceptional visibility and the brakes once again are highly efficient. Take off is perfectly normal and once established in cruise a very good feature that comes to attention is the combined elevator and rudder trim control on the stick. A necessary item to have with 200 hp. Control movements load up with increased speed but no more than would be expected with a higher performance aircraft.

In cruise in-cabin noise is surprisingly low. Normal conversation is possible in the rear seats and the visibility from the rear seats is brilliant. A key feature being the forward view through the canopy side.

Robin aircraft have a very comprehensive yet simple flight manual. The performance speeds are accurate and the aircraft does exactly what is expected of it. Extending flap will lower the stall speed by five knots to 55 knots. Clean, the aircraft will stall at 60 knots. In a fully developed stall the aircraft will drop a wing. Recovery is normal.

Approach speed is best at 80 knots reducing to 70 knots



*A forward sliding canopy allows for surprisingly refined entry and exit.*

over the threshold. For a large aircraft it will stop surprisingly quickly without excessive use of brake.

If the smaller R2160 is heavenly then the DR500 President is luxury. This has to be close to the motoring equivalent of a Bristol 407. True pace with grace or in aeronautical terms; payload and distance at speed.

There will be fewer contenders for this top line model but there are a surprising number of other Robins in the line up. You state your purpose and pick the aircraft according to need.

These two examples are demonstrators and a second R2160 will arrive in about six weeks time. Further aircraft are anticipated throughout the year. Pricing is variable according to options fitted but the key items are well understood US components and the assembly engineers commented favourably on access, materials used, finish and attention to detail.

Potential buyers are invited to contact Iazard Pacific Aviation for a demonstration of '*les belles francaise*'.



Reprinted for Iazard Pacific Aviation from the March 2001 issue of NZ Aviation News.

NEW ZEALAND

**AVIATION**

NEWS