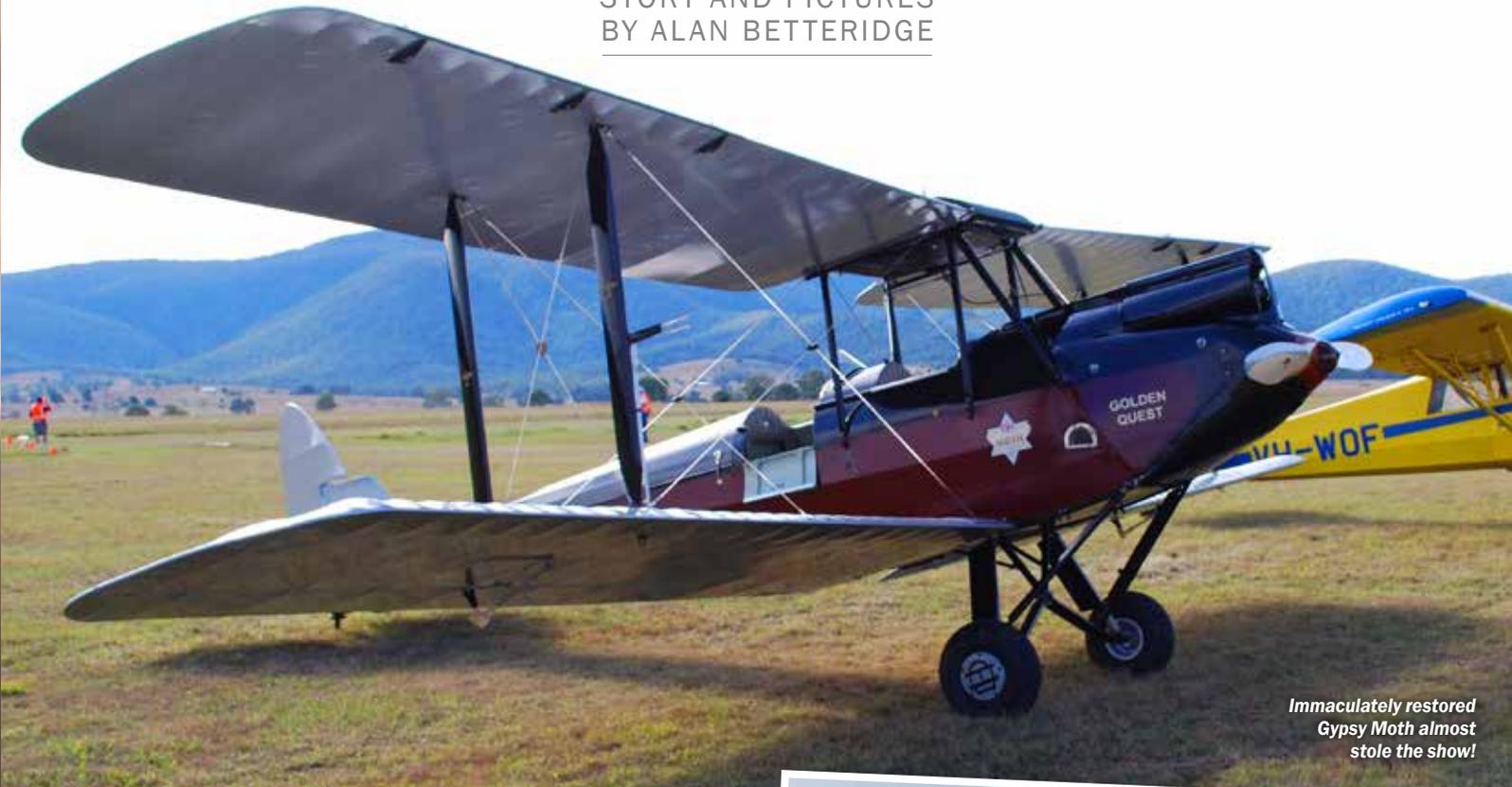


# Watts Bridge Shines

STORY AND PICTURES  
BY ALAN BETTERIDGE



*Immaculately restored Gypsy Moth almost stole the show!*

**O**RGANISERS of this year's 'Gathering of Eagles' fly-in at Watts Bridge airfield near Toogoolwah (Qld) had a few nervous days leading up to the event because rain had been forecast; and nothing spoils a fly-in more than inclement weather.

But they needn't have worried because of the weather Gods smiled favourably and the rain held off – at least until the Saturday afternoon and had cleared the area by Sunday morning.

The event is the biggest on the Watts Bridge calendar and, as a result, many people put in a lot of time and effort to ensure it ran smoothly.

This year the focus was on the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli and, to this end, many people dressed in military uniforms of both WW I and II.

Visitors were met at the gate by a very official looking member of the Africa Corp 'Sgt' Mike Krause, a man who had an uncanny resemblance to Sgt Schultz of Hogan's Heroes fame, making sure no one was carrying any contraband in the form of eskies.

Sgt Krause threatened to confiscate them but in the end he relented and let visitors keep them anyway.

By 8am aircraft started arriving en-masse and the sky came alive to the sound of recreational and general aviation in all its glory.

Many aircraft stood out from the crowd but none so more than Bill Finlen's immaculately rebuilt Gypsy Moth.

Bill said the rebuild had been a labour of love.

"This aircraft was imported into Australia by a mining company in 1929 and was used to help them search for the fabled Lasseter's reef," Bill said.

"This was the reason they named it 'Golden Quest' in respect to its duties with the company."

As history shows, the famed reef of gold was never found but to this day, people still look for it in the hope of striking it rich.

Bill said the aircraft had an accident in the early thirties and, after being rebuilt, was sold to someone in New Zealand. Bill obtained the aircraft



*Largest aircraft at the show was this Grumman Mallard from Evans Head*



*A good looking Savannah gets ready to commit aviation*

in about 2010 and started the arduous task of rebuilding it.

The end result is a tribute to his skill and dedication in bringing back to life a part of Australia's aviation history.

"There are only about three Gypsy Moths in Australia (all in South East Qld) and about eight left in the world.

"So this aircraft is quite unique," he said.

Ross Rossow checks out his dream machine – a replica Spitfire



Visitors were welcomed by Mike Krause of the 'Winds of War' Military History Group

Bruce Clarke's replica Sopwith Camel



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Simply impressive – this Yak-3U-R2000 Reno Racer had heads craned skywards when it flew in



Peter Freeman and his pride and joy a Light Wing GR912S



Glennis Rossow made the trip up from Stanthorpe for the weekend's event

The Gathering of Eagles has always had a reputation for attracting unusual aircraft and this year was no exception.

A Grumman Mallard amphibian flew up from Evens Head (NSW) and really made an impressive sight when it arrived overhead.

The sound of its twin radial engines could be heard long before it could be seen and had many people trying to guess what was coming! Another spectacular arrival was in the form of a Yak-3U-R2000 Reno Racer, one of the fastest radial engine aircraft around. This aircraft (VH-YOV) holds the speed record for a set course of well over 400MPH and to see it do a fly past is something many people will never forget.

A very smart looking L200D was in attendance and had people talking about the unusual cabin shape and the unmistakable twin tail layout.

The aircraft was built by the Czechoslovak Automobile and Aircraft Company in 1965 and first appeared on the Australian register in 2013.

There were a large number of RA-Aus registered aircraft in attendance (as usual) and the talk of the field was clearly the handling of the Jabiru Issue by CASA.

While many thought the safety authority had been heavy handed, others agreed that some action had been required. Frank Jensen, a Jabiru owner, said he thought CASA should have taken into consideration the

number of Jabiru aircraft flying and then found out how many of those had experienced engine problems and how many had, in fact, completed all of the AD notices.

"I have never had an issue with either of my aircraft and I believe it's because I have always made sure everything was up to date," Frank said.

"I know in the past there were engine issues and most of these have been well and truly overcome."

Frank said the idea of getting passengers to sign a waiver was a pointless exercise.

"My wife and I have flown all over Australia without so much as a hiccup and now I'm expected to get her to sign a waiver before she flies with me. How ridiculous is that?"

Taking a different viewpoint was Jabiru owner, Vern Howard.

"I think by what CASA has done has brought the engine issues out into the open and made people more aware of what needs to be done," Vern said.

"If more people take the time to ensure all ADs are completed, the fewer engine related problems there will be and surely that can only be a good thing?" he said.

Whatever the view taken it is obvious that the issue and CASA's handling of it was the talk of the Gathering and will be the talk of the recreational community for some time yet. ☹️

"many people put in a lot of time and effort to ensure it ran smoothly"