

LSA rejuvenates aero club



Peter Burke report and photographs

A new training aeroplane has given a new lease of life to the Wanganui Aero Club.

Since buying its new Viper LX SD-4 a few months ago, the club has seen a significant upsurge in flying hours and money in the bank, according to club secretary David Pearce. The Viper is a replacement for a Tomahawk which had served the club well, but David says the decision to change has paid off.

"We did a lot of homework before we bought it, and it was really hard to find a

replacement aircraft. After a lot of research we settled on the Viper as the best option in terms of bringing down the price we charge students and also to give them the opportunity to experience the most up-to-date technology," he says.

Price was important, says David, given that the overall economic climate is challenging for many people, especially those in small cities and towns such as Wanganui. The chargeout rate for the Viper is \$175 dual/\$150 solo as opposed to



Wanganui Aero Club secretary David Pearce (left) and president Bruce Gordon in the new Viper.

the Tomahawk's \$210 dual/\$190 solo.

"In terms of research before we bought the aircraft, we set up a sub-committee and they did a lot of homework. We looked at a lot of options and then Ewan Wilson brought the Viper down for a demonstration just before Christmas and everybody was very taken with it," he says.

He says the many appealing features include the Viper's glass cockpit and low fuel consumption which makes for cheaper flying for students and members. As well as the two-seat Viper, the Wanganui Aero Club operates a four-seat Cessna 172 for its 52 members.

The club was established in 1929 and has had a long and successful history along with Wanganui airport, which just two years ago celebrated the 50th anniversary of an upgrade that enabled it to take Fokker Friendships.

Today activity at the airport has dropped back from the halcyon days of the 1960s and 70s, but hard work by club members and instructor Stephen Love has ensured that Wanganui remains a popular training airfield.

For David Pearce, Wanganui with its uncluttered airspace was an ideal place to learn to fly. He runs a large farm at Waitotara and

has been flying for about 12 years.

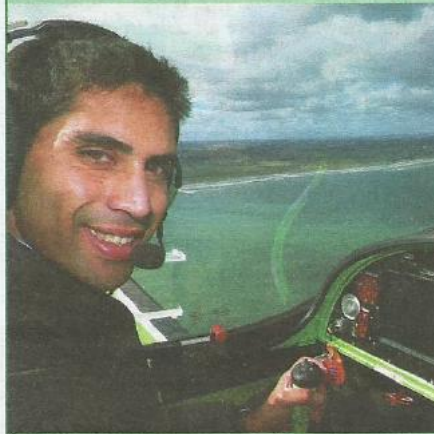
"It's something I'd always wanted to do and I thought I'd better get my licence before I got too blind or too deaf. I thoroughly enjoy the relaxation and the ability from time to time to have a look around my farm which is just north of here.

"We have an extensive 3000ha sheep, beef and dairy property and it is good to fly over it to check the water is going in the paddock and see how the stock are going from the plane. I can check the farm out pretty quickly from the air," he says.



The Wanganui Aero Club is proud of its long history on the site, including the 1932 official pageant as shown by David Pearce.

Stephen Love, instructor



The B category instructor at the Wanganui Aero Club is Stephen Love. He's been there for just over a year and enjoys both the town and the new aircraft. He trained at the Christchurch International Aviation Academy in 2004 and, after graduating a year later, went on to complete both his C and B category instructor ratings at nearby Feilding.

A stint as an instructor at Feilding was followed by a move to Whakatane which saw Stephen in the scenic flight business, taking tourists to White Island off the Bay of Plenty coast. He worked there for about three years and enjoyed the nature of the operation.

"I just really enjoyed the general aviation scene, and the whole reason for getting into aviation from the start was because I loved flying, so I wanted to do lots of different things. In my school days I was always interested in aviation and in particular helicopters.

"My Dad did bit of work on helicopters

and as a kid I was able to climb into the helicopter and look at the instruments and controls. So from a very early age I was interested in flying," he says.

Stephen says the Viper is attracting people to the club partly because the cost of flying is cheaper but also because of the new aeroplane itself.

"Students love it. The main thing they love about it is the fact that it is just immaculate, in really good condition, and the instrumentation is just amazing. It's all electronic screens and I think in the long run those people who have gone through the transition of analogue to electronic instruments will probably find it easier.

"In some ways it's probably more of a young person's aircraft. I notice the young people really get into the dial-on displays quicker. Another reason I like it is because it's closer to commercial aircraft instrumentation than older analogue displays."

The Viper is very much a light aircraft and much has already been written about its flying characteristics (*Aviation News* April 2013). Stephen says he personally likes its handling characteristics.

"Given that it is a light aircraft, you have to pick the conditions a little more when you go up, but it handles really nicely and because of its low wing it has very good visibility which I think is very important for students."

The move to the Viper LX SD-4 has so far proved to be a winner for the Wanganui Aero Club. The challenges of trying to maintain good flying hours and to attract members are something that all clubs struggle with. In the case of the Wanganui Aero Club, the Viper appears to be a viable option.