

PROP NEWS

The Catalina Flying Memorial Consolidated PB-Y-6A Catalina N160AT (c/n 2029) draws up on the Maroochydore apron on December 5 as she nears the end of her remarkably trouble-free marathon ferry flight from Siea, Portugal, to Bankstown, Sydney. (Paul Howard)

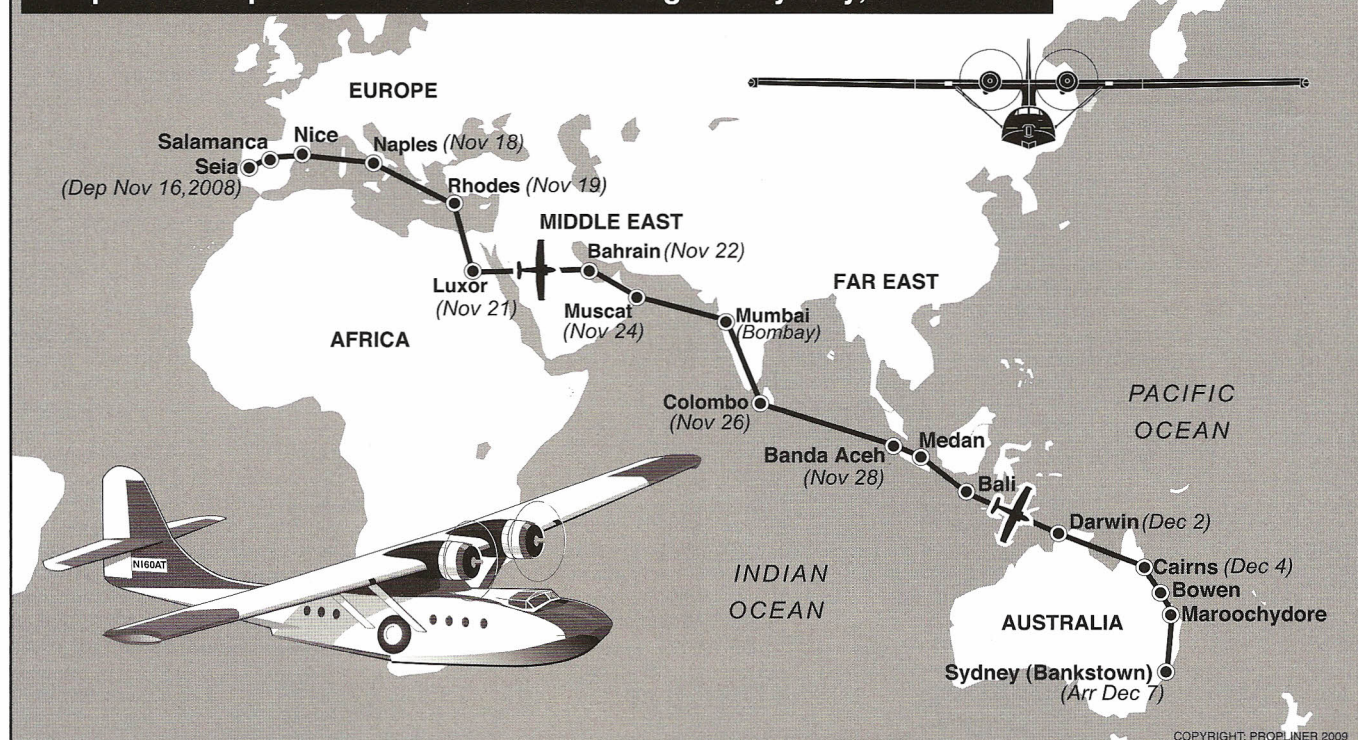
SUNSHINE COAST CAT

A year after the first unsuccessful attempt, the Australian Catalina Flying Memorial completed a text-book ferry flight of PB-Y-6A Catalina N160AT (c/n 2029, the former CC-CNP) from Siea, Portugal, to Bankstown Airport, Sydney, late in 2008. Under the supervision of Geoff Hazelton, two replacement engines and propellers were fitted to the Catalina during October at a cost of over \$90,000, replacing the units that had failed during the earlier ferry flight attempt in 2007. Total ferry flight costs were expected to exceed \$150,000, with avgas accounting for the bulk of the expense.

Following a successful test flight early in November, the Catalina began her ferry flight on November 15 when she flew from Siea to Salamanca in Spain. With winter snow having already fallen in the Sierra Mountains, the ferry flight became a matter of urgency, with the crew fearing that any delay would lead to the aircraft becoming stranded in Portugal until the spring. Flown by a crew of six including three pilots

comprising Jim Hazelton, Hal Griffiths and Richard Purdy, and two members from the Dutch Catalina group, the amphibian flew on to Nice on November 17, and then Naples and Rhodes on the next day, with the aircraft apparently "flying like a dream". At every stop, the aircraft was greeted by enthusiasts and well-wishers alike keen to learn more from these adventurers. Luxor was reached on November 21, where fuel peaked at \$4.58 per litre and handling charges amounted to \$900, and then Bahrain on November 22, where a thorough check was undertaken of the engines. Despite the high cost of avgas, the Catalina flew on, landing at Muscat on November 23, Mumbai on November 24 and Colombo two days later. Careful handling of the engines saw the skilled pilots achieving an average groundspeed of over 130 knots and an average fuel consumption of 90 gallons per hour, with oil consumption gradually reducing as the flight continued. The sector from Muscat to Mumbai saw the Catalina flying at an altitude of 8,000 feet, which necessitated the use of

Antipodean amphibian: Catalina N160AT's flight to Sydney, Bankstown



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some warm clothing as there was no heater aboard. Having landed at Mumbai at 1530, the crew discovered that Avgas would not be available for over four hours, and a long day ended with dinner served in the Gordon House at 2300. India proved to be one big bureaucratic adventure, and the crew were relieved to depart early the next morning for Colombo, where the welcome was warm and friendly.

And so the sixty five year old Catalina flew purposefully and smoothly on, landing in Medan on November 29 and Bali the next day. A day of rest followed before the Catalina and crew finally landed on Australian soil, touching down at Darwin on the afternoon of December 2. Two days later the aircraft flew on to Cairns, and then on the morning of December 5 she flew to Bowen and Maroochydore. Prior to making her final touchdown at Bankstown Airport at two o'clock on the afternoon of December 7, N160AT performed a touch and go on the waters of Lake Macquarie, a scene witnessed by many excited spectators. The aircraft will now adopt the marks VH-CAT, and will be based at Rathmines, on the shore of Lake Macquarie. This was one of the Royal Australian Air Force's major flying boat bases during World War Two, and it is intended that the Catalina will operate from both land and water, thereby preserving Australia's famous flying boat heritage in grand style.

NEWSWORTHY TURBO DAKOTAS

Several turbine-powered DC-3s have been in the spotlight recently. Here in the UK Bell Geospace Basler BT-67 **C-FTGI** (c/n 26268) has been active undertaking aerial survey work in Northern Ireland and southern England. This aircraft first arrived on this side of the Atlantic on August 30 2008 when she landed at Galway, Ireland, after a ferry flight from Ellington Field via Houston, Oshawa, Goose Bay and Reykjavik. Three months were then spent on survey work both in the Irish Republic and then Northern Ireland (undertaking a major survey named "Tellus"), before the aircraft was ferried from Enniskillen to Bournemouth (Hurn) on the afternoon of December 12. Operating from the FR Aviation apron at Hurn, she then began a four week long geophysical survey covering the Isle of Wight and the area to the north of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Lymington in the search for oil reserves. Flown on behalf of Norwest Energy as part of their hydrocarbon exploration programme, 'GI flew the survey at a height of 300 metres, with its smooth PT-6 turbines undoubtedly reducing the noise footprint that would have been enjoyed by so many had the original Twin Wasps remained in place. This survey was completed on Friday January 9 2009.

Another Canadian registered BT-67 attracting attention is **C-GEAJ** (c/n 26120) flown by Enterprise Air on behalf of Antarctica Logistics Center International (ALCI) on support flying in the Antarctic. On Monday January 5 this aircraft was performing a supply flight within the British led ICECAP project when it crashed into a 3,200 metre high mountain in the region. The aircraft was delivering spare parts for cross-country vehicles when poor visibility apparently forced the crew to make an emergency landing. Fortunately, the three crew members and one Russian scientist all survived and were picked up by another aircraft. The BT-67 sustained severe damage and is reportedly a write-off. Several other BT-67s are also currently active in the Antarctic including **C-GAWI** (c/n 19227) of the Alfred Wegener Institute. This aircraft was fitted out at Bremerhaven in Germany during 2008, making her return to Canada on July 15 when she flew Bremerhaven-Glasgow-Reykjavik. **C-GEAI** (c/n 33053) is also flown on behalf of ALCI, whilst Kenn Borek Air fly **C-FMKB** (c/n 19560) and **C-GJKB** (c/n 13383) on Antarctic support work. A number of the BT-67s are ski-equipped for their Antarctic operations.

A turbine-powered DC-3 of South African origin was damaged at Mojave-Kern County Airport on February 4 when **N834TP** (c/n 12590) incurred substantial damage during the course of a training flight. The AMI-65TP Turbo DC-3 had just lifted off from runway 30 when it suddenly dropped back to the ground and veered off the runway, causing 600 gallons of fuel to leak from the aircraft's damaged tanks. A highly modified example, this aircraft featured a belly radar and chin FLIR turret. She had previously served with the South African Air Force.

PBY-6A Catalina N160AT leaves Cairns on December 5.

(Andy Belczacki)

NOLINOR CONVAIR AFRICA BOUND

Report by Steve Frejek

A rare sight on the Atlantic, Nolinor Convair 580 freighter **C-FHNM** (c/n 454) was noted recently crossing this ocean on a flight to Africa. She flew from Montreal (Mirabel) to Saint John's, Newfoundland, and Horta, in the Azores, on February 11. A short 45 minute long flight to Santa Maria followed, before she departed from Santa Maria at eight o'clock on the morning of February 12, flying initially to Laayoune Hassan in Morocco, before landing at Bamako, Mali, late in the afternoon. The reason for this flight is currently unknown.

AIR ELITE BUYS DOUGLAS DC-4

A hitherto little known organisation named Air Elite Corporation registered the former ARDCO Douglas C-54D Skymaster **N9015Q** (c/n 22178) on October 29 2008. Air Elite gives a Benbrook, Tarrant, Texas, address, with the aircraft now based at Tucson, Arizona. It is intended to maintain the aircraft in full airworthy condition, and to offer her for dry or wet lease, vintage rides and sightseeing, historical events, humanitarian flights (including Red Cross and United Nations), advertising and movie work, and general cargo ship and freighter. While some of these roles may seem ambitious, the former air tanker is one of the most immaculate examples in existence.

The driving force behind the project and Air Elite founder is Captain Gianni Bottardi, whose flying experience extends to DC-9s, Boeing 737s, several executive jets and the DC-3. He also describes himself as an aeronautical consultant and ferry pilot. He is joined in the enterprise by Captain Roberto Ferilli, also a DC-9 and 737 pilot, and owner of a P-51 Mustang, and another pilot, Cristiano Gabriele. "Propliner" wishes this venture every success, and looks forward to reporting activities undertaken by the Skymaster.



Basler BT-67 C-FMKB has returned to service with Kenn Borek Air following her mishap in the Antarctic in December 2007. She is seen here following roll-out at Calgary on October 5.
(Anthony J Hickey)

AIR TAHOMA GROUNDED

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) took the extreme action of revoking Air Tahoma's operating certificate on January 12 2009 following thirty violations made by the carrier. This effectively grounded the airline's Convair 580 fleet, which had been undertaking contract cargo work for Federal Express and DHL in mainland USA and the Caribbean. Investigation into Air Tahoma's operations followed the fatal crash of **N587X** (c/n 361) at Rickenbacker Airport, Ohio, on September 1 when three crew members lost their lives during the course of a test flight following maintenance.

In a 96-page document issued by the FAA, it was revealed that on the fateful flight, while the pilot in command, Captain Urs Anderegg, was qualified to fly the 580 on a maintenance check flight, his two passengers, Sean Gardiner and James Monahan, were not qualified to serve as assistant crew members. Other findings in the report were that maintenance records were incomplete, equipment was used that did not comply with FAA requirements, and maintenance was performed without adherence to manual procedures.

Various members of the Air Tahoma fleet have now returned to Rickenbacker Airport for storage pending a decision on the airline's future. **N585P** (c/n 163), which had been flying contract freight services in Vietnam, returned during the autumn of 2008, flying from Ugolny to Anchorage on October 16, prior to flying on to Rickenbacker via Spokane two days later. **N581P** (c/n 29), **N582P** (c/n 475) and **N584E** (c/n 24) had all been operating services from Miami, and they returned to Rickenbacker on January 22, 23 and 26 respectively. **N588X** (c/n 52), meanwhile, was last known parked at Miami.