

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM SIGNIFICANT AVIATION EVENTS PROFILES

The 1966 National Air Show – and RACSA’s part in it¹



An aerial view of the National Air Show participants on the ground at Parafield on Saturday 10 September 1966 [SAAM collection].

1966 was the fortieth anniversary year for the Royal Aero Club of South Australia (RACSA) and very important event for it that year was the National Air Show Adelaide 1966, in which the club played a major part. The show apparently grew out of a very successful Port Lincoln fly-in and air show early in the year, after which some of the participants discussed what a good idea it would be to hold something bigger and better at Parafield.

There hadn't been much in the way of public events at Parafield for some time: the last were the 1961 Business Aviation Symposium put on by the club and sponsored by the aircraft distributors, which was planned to be an annual event, but wasn't; and of course the finish of the 1964 Ansett Brisbane-Adelaide Air Race at Parafield brought the crowds too.

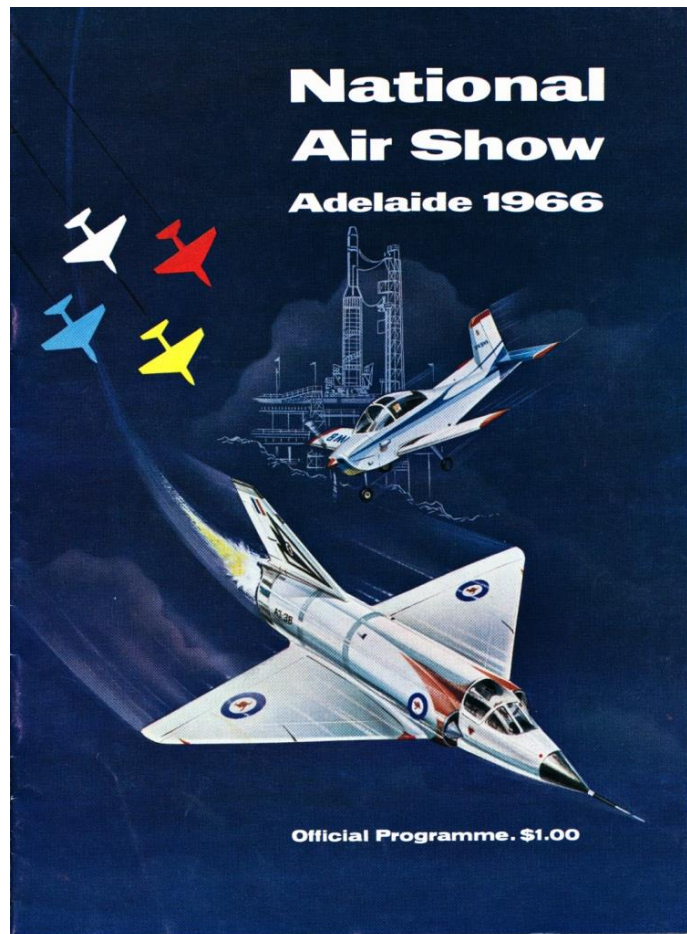
¹Adapted from Chapter 9 of *Wing Tips – The story of the Royal Aero Club of South Australia – Book 2: 1941-1986*, Mike Miiln 2018 Avonmore Books

By April the idea had gained enough traction for a planning committee to be formed and a date of 10 September 1966 set. Reg Rechner – TAA’s state manager and an ex-RAAF group captain with a CBE and DFC, the Citizen Air Force member of the Commonwealth Government’s Air Board – was chairman of the committee. Nobby Buckley, ex-president of the club and by then Avis state manager, was vice-chairman. Piper, Beech and Cessna distributors were represented, as was Rothmans, the principal sponsor (a public relations company), the RAAF and, of course, the club.

Graham Alderman was then manager of the club and the club’s representative on the planning committee. He was also made chairman of a flying display subcommittee, one of five subcommittees reporting to the planning committee. The DCA was not on the planning committee, although Jim Schofield, the DCA’s Adelaide operations superintendent, played a big role in planning the event and was presumably active on the aerodromes and flying display subcommittees.

The show was originally planned to be held at RAAF Base Edinburgh, but because this was so totally at odds with the desires of the general aviation industry that was to be featured, agreement was reached to have a civil show at Parafield on Saturday 10 September, followed by a joint military–civil show at Edinburgh on the Sunday.

This was then expanded to include a half-day business aviation symposium on the Friday prior to the show to “provide a background of understanding for the Australian business leaders ... who were specially invited to participate”.² A range of topics on business aviation was addressed by industry leaders, including Ansett General Aviation (GA), Rex Aviation, Hawker de Havilland, Beechcraft and the DCA, to 380 attendees. Some of the aircraft distributors then demonstrated their aircraft, so the symposium pretty much followed the same format as the one organised by the club in 1961 that was intended to be an annual event.



*The National Air Show Official Program cover
[SAAM Collection].*

² *Aircraft* magazine, October 1966, p. 48. *Aircraft* magazine devoted four pages to the events.



Formation of nine Victor – the seven RACSA aircraft (Ted Acres, Terry Haines, Bruce Hartwig, Graham Dunn, Gerry Lawson, Barry Mead and Keith Mattner) plus one belonging to John Pope and one to Chris Sperou – on 10 September 1966 [G. Lawson].

many of the general aviation types demonstrated the previous day, plus RAAF Vulcans, the RAAF's Telstars formation aerobatics team in their Vampire trainers, a Winjeel group from Point Cook, a Meteor, a Sabre, a Canberra and a formation of Mirages.

The first Mirage had been accepted by the RAAF in France in April 1963, with the second also French-built before assembly of the aircraft began by the Government Aircraft Factory (GAF) at Avalon for delivery to the RAAF starting in 1964. They first became operational with 75 Squadron in 1965, so at the Edinburgh show they must have been a new and exciting exhibit whatever *Aircraft* said about the "stodginess" of the show.



Ch29-4 RAAF Mirage A3-19, which was delivered on 10 August 1965 and served with 77 Squadron [National Air Show Program – SAAM Collection].

The show next day at Parafield was huge. Some 57,000 people attended a day packed with general aviation aircraft demonstrations, formation flying by the club in its Victor and aircraft flown in from Singapore by the RAF, including a couple of Vulcans, a Mk 2 Victor and RAF Transport Command Argosy and Britannia transports. There was even a display of Boomerang and Arrow gliders manufactured at Parafield by Edmund Schneider Ltd.

Victa used the occasion to display the Aircruiser prototype publicly for the first time. The focus was on practical general aviation use, so there was no attempt to put on spectacular displays of spine-tingling aerobatics and such. The spectacle was simply the packed program of some 160 aircraft over the 150-minute display.

The next day at Edinburgh, according to *Aircraft* magazine, which called it "rather stodgy", seems to have been a bit of an anticlimax, although another big crowd attended. There were seventy aircraft involved; including

The “Yellow Streaks” team in their Winjeels did very low-level inverted four-plane crossovers, so there seems to have been plenty of excitement. There were also various static displays, including RAAF and civil aircraft parks that spectators could walk among, and displays of missiles, avionics and weapons systems.



*CC-1 Replica as displayed at SAAM – Feb 2019
[M Milln].*

One very much out-of-the-ordinary display was a replica of the first Clyde Cessna design, a Bleriot-type monoplane with a three-cylinder Anzani engine that Ross Aviation’s Gordon Lewis and his engineering section had built for the show over eight days in their own time. That aircraft was donated to the South Australian Aviation Museum (SAAM) in January 2016 by Lewis’s family in Gawler, where it had been stored in a farm shed for fifty years, and has been restored for display by the Museum.

The three-day event was acclaimed publicly as a huge success, but Graham Alderman didn’t think so. In his monthly report to the club’s committee he acknowledged the show itself being a success, but said *“some aspects of Parafield were found wanting, because of lack of cooperation from some of the distributors”*.³ He grumbled the club should never hold another event in conjunction with the operators and if Reg Rechner wanted another air show in two years, as he apparently had suggested, it should be at Edinburgh with the RAAF leading the organising as they had done at the Mallala shows prior to Edinburgh’s construction.



Club manager Graham Alderman meeting the Royal Federation of Australian Aero Clubs’ President Peter Lloyd at Adelaide Airport Oct 1966 [SAAM collection].

Charlie Roper, the club’s chief flying instructor, in his report to the committee, went further and said most of the success had been attached to the symposium and flying displays, the parts of the show the club had most control over. As for the general aviation operators, who had been the moving force behind the show being staged at all, *“they were content to sit*

³ Manager’s Report to the RACSA management committee, August 1966.

back and leave everything to the club, and I am sure that it was only by Mr Alderman's intervention that the show at Parafield went on".⁴

Part of the problem seems to have been that the club's staff were already bearing an abnormally heavy workload at the time because of events unrelated to the air show. The



Charlie Roper (right) with Henry Millicer, designer of the Victa Airtourer, at the 1965 conference of the Royal Federation of Australian Aero Clubs [SAAM collection].

flight office had been moved only three days before the show from the tower, where the clubrooms were, to an annex off the club's hangar, and Graham Alderman was heavily involved in the planning required. He was also busy with the refurbishment of the clubrooms in anticipation of finally getting the nod for a liquor licence so they could set up a bar.

This was all part of delivering the decision the club's management committee had made to accept in principle the proposal to compete more effectively with the commercial operators. They had decided to do that by separating the club's activities into independent profit centres, including a licenced clubhouse, flight school and engineering shop. Charlie Roper had already implemented a new series of ground school courses to replace those previously undertaken by correspondence and was busy with commitments to teaching a couple of nights a week in addition to his flight instruction duties.

With all this going on behind the scenes, perhaps Graham Alderman could be forgiven a little grumpiness over most of the Parafield planning for the National Air Show being left to him!

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⁴ Chief Flying Instructor's Report to the RACSA management committee, August 1966 [although headed August, these reports were evidently written after the event on 9–11 September 1966].