

THE 1969 UK-AUSTRALIA AIR RACE



The 1969 BP England-Australia Commemorative Air Race Official Programme Cover program [SAAM Collection].

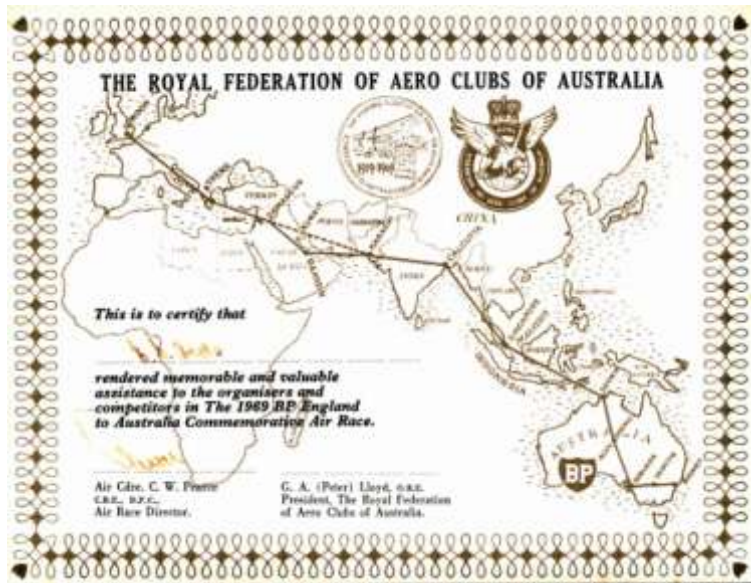
The 1969 air race, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1919 UK to Australia race won by the Smith brothers in the Vimy, got off to a shaky start. Graham Alderman had floated it as an idea back in 1966 as manager of the Royal Aero Club of South Australia (RACSA), but although the Royal Federation of Aero Clubs of Australia (the national umbrella organisation for the aero clubs) was reasonably quick to pick up on the idea, their approach to Hudson Fysh to be race director set them back. He was very unenthusiastic about the idea and influenced the Royal Aero Club in the UK to be too.

1967 and 1968 were spent developing the concept and bringing the UK club around to support it, largely through the efforts of the Federation president, Peter Lloyd. Although the original idea had been to race over the route the Smiths took in the Vickers Vimy as closely as possible to Darwin then to a finish line at Parafield, this was compromised by the emergence of a secondary objective: to commemorate also the bicentenary of James Cook's discovery of Australia's east coast in

1770. This, of course, meant the race had to be extended from Adelaide to Sydney and it had to end in 1970. That was good news from one point of view, because it brought whole new sources of funding into play and probably also caused the Commonwealth Government to take the project more seriously. The Commonwealth had initially been very cool towards it and approached it in the time-worn way that governments tend to – pretty much “show us your money and then we'll decide whether to contribute Commonwealth funds”.

Air Commodore C.W. Pearce CBE, DFC, was appointed as race director instead of Hudson Fysh, with the Secretary General of the Royal Aero Club of the UK in charge in England with the assistance of a handicapping committee and a competition manager. Air Commodore Pearce had retired from the RAAF in 1965 as Commander of the Richmond RAAF Base in NSW. He'd won his DFC flying Sunderlands in No. 10 Squadron RAAF on anti-submarine patrols in 1940 and his CBE for services in New Guinea. In Australia Peter Lloyd headed a sixteen-member race committee, which included BP's managing director and PR support staff plus various senior aero club and Federation officials from around the country. The club was represented on this committee by Ted Acres (who was RACSA's president) and Graham Alderman, and it was Graham who coordinated the Parafield arrangements, with

his time paid from race funds. The club made a huge commitment in resources on top of Graham's and Ted's committee time and Graham's organisational work: Eric Furness, Syd Dunstone and Des Gillespie acted as deputy stewards¹; Charlie Roper, RACSA's CFI, was chief marshal Adelaide; engineer Max West was a technical marshal Adelaide; and numerous club volunteers manned the tower to spot and time contestants, parked aircraft, assisted contestants and so on.



The RFACA Certificate of Appreciation awarded to Ted Acres for his organising assistance before and during the race [M. Acres].

RACSA and the Federation spent a lot of time approaching potential commercial sponsors and the SA and NSW Governments for commitments to the project. In the end BP took on the primary sponsorship and was given naming rights to make the race's official title "The BP England–Australia Commemorative Air Race". BP contributed \$50,000 to race costs, of which \$25,000 went towards the Commonwealth Prize and Prime Minister's Trophy for the winner of the entire route to Sydney. The Commonwealth provided \$25,000, the SA Government \$10,000 and the NSW

Government \$15,000, with the Commonwealth and NSW also funding trophies.

The SA Government's contribution included \$1,000 for a UK–Adelaide trophy, and its contribution was particularly hard-won. When approaches to the premier by the race committee were ignored, Peter Lloyd brought Air Commodore Pearce to Adelaide on 14 May 1969 to accompany Ted Acres and Graham Alderman to meet the premier. They actually met acting premier DeGaris instead and were told that the premier, Steele Hall, had suspended discussion of the issue because of lack of clarity about the state's role in the race. Hall had been in power just over a year since the Liberal and Country League government was elected for one term in a brief interlude during the Dunstan decade. He was highly suspicious of the plan to extend the race to Sydney for the Cook Bicentennial celebrations, which he thought would diminish the focus on the commemoration of the Vimy flight and Adelaide's central role.

The meeting accomplished something because Premier Hall was reported a couple of days later as saying Cabinet would consider a state contribution. However, by 23 May he was still being reported as saying *"the granting of financial aid would be difficult until more definite information became available on the part South Australia would play"*.² On 29 May Air Commodore Pearce publicly *"expressed surprise at reports that there was a lack of information on the part Adelaide would play"* and went on to confirm: *"The whole object of*

¹ And ex-RACSA CFI, Neil Woodroffe, by then with the DCA.

² *The Advertiser*, 23 May 1969.

the race is to commemorate the flight of the South Australian brothers Sir Keith and Sir Ross Smith from England to Australia 50 years ago. It is therefore predominantly a South Australian show".³ No doubt the air commodore also told the NSW Government that the whole object of the race was to commemorate Captain Cook's Bicentenary, but he came back to Adelaide on 3 June to meet Steele Hall with Ted Acres, Keith Thomas (RACSA's VP) and Graham Alderman, and this was finally enough to convince Hall, and the \$10,000 contribution was duly announced in the press the next day.⁴ Incidentally, at the UK end the London Daily Express had already announced contributions of £1,500 (A\$3,230) towards costs and £5,000 (A\$10,750) for prize money.

With the funding confirmed, Lloyd and Pearce left for the UK on 20 June to complete arrangements, and came home via Washington. The fees to be paid to the Royal Aero Club UK for their part in the organisation were agreed, which included funding to hire a full-time person to assist the UK club's race manager and the commissioning of a UK public relations company. The US side trip was all about publicising the race, so the Australian Embassy arranged a press conference for them in New York to get the US aviation press on side, and they met all the right people in the Department of Transportation in Washington.

Lloyd announced the race basics on 15 July after they got back to Sydney⁵: the route would follow the Vimy's path as much as possible, with compulsory stops at Athens, Karachi, Calcutta, Singapore, Darwin, Alice Springs, Adelaide, Griffith and Sydney. The field would be split into three classes: the first for single unsupercharged piston-engined aircraft up to 5,000 lb all-up weight (AUW); the second for light twin unsupercharged piston-engined aircraft up to 12,500 lb AUW; and the third for supercharged piston or propeller turbine single- or twin-engined aircraft up to 12,500 lb AUW. Entry fees for the three classes would be \$60, \$100 and \$150, respectively; and a total of \$100,000 in prize money would be awarded. The three main prizes would be \$25,000 for the best overall performance London–Sydney, \$10,000 for the best performance London–Adelaide plus the SA Government's "Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith Prize" Trophy, and \$10,000 for the fastest time London–Sydney plus the NSW Government's "Captain Cook Bicentennial Trophy". Military aircraft and/or personnel could enter providing the same rules applied, and at the last minute two jet aircraft were accepted in a separate speed race event: a Qantas HS125 used for jet training and a Canadian armed forces Dassault Falcon.

The handicapping was calculated according to formulae detailed in five pages of the *"Supplementary Regulations to Race Regulations First Issue"* and was *"based on a formula relating to wing area and power, with standard allowances made for a few major features of the aircraft, such as fixed undercarriages, superchargers and so on"*.⁶ In addition to the six mandatory stops between Gatwick and Adelaide, contestants were allowed to make prescribed numbers of additional stops on each sector up to a total of thirteen. Two hours were allowed at each of the mandatory stops and half an hour at any verified intermediate stop. So the estimated race time (ERT) for each aircraft was calculated according to the formulae in the Supplementary Regulations and its handicap time was the difference

³ *The News*, 29 May 1969.

⁴ *The Advertiser*, 3 June 1969.

⁵ *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 1969.

⁶ Regulations 1st Issue BP England–Australia Air Race 1969, s5.1.1.

between its ERT and the highest value ERT of any aircraft in the race. A contestant's race time was then based on its Gatwick start time and Parafield finish time, less time allowance for mandatory and verified intermediate stops, plus or minus the calculated handicap time. This meant aircraft did not have to be timed through any of the intermediate stops, so there was no advantage in reducing time spent on the ground below the allowed maximum.



Ted Acres's 12 November 1969 commemorative postal cover [M. Acres].

RACSA organised a fundraising dinner on 28 August 1969, hosted by Adelaide Lord Mayor Robert Porter, for thirty-five guests at the South Australian Hotel, many of whom were managing directors or other notables from the airline, manufacturing, wine, pastoral, banking, retail and press industries. Sir Donald Bradman was there, as was the secretary to the premier and BP's state manager, plus Air Commodore Pearce, Peter Lloyd with a

couple of other Federation executives and a cohort from RACSA that included Ted Acres, Syd Dunstone, Keith Thomas, Graham Alderman and Alan Killmier. They all ate roast beef and Yorkshire pudding washed down with some choice SA clarets, and a pitiful \$250 was pledged. More was donated eventually, because Elder Smith & Co. presented the \$2,500 third prize for the UK–Adelaide part of the race, for example, and the official race programme lists fifty-four sponsors, of which at least twelve were SA-based. But – fundraising dinners in Sydney and Melbourne had raised \$22,000 and \$18,000 respectively. The Federation also commissioned Eric White Associates' fundraising division to undertake fundraising activities, so no doubt it was better at it than was RACSA.

The race was to start at Gatwick in England on 17 December 1969 (the start was actually delayed a day because of fog and snow all over northern Europe), and arrive at Parafield between 22 and 29 December, with finishers accepted up until midnight on the 29th. The arrival dates in Australia were supposed to coincide more or less with the 1919 race, but also to finish in Sydney as the first commemorative event of 1970. It was absolutely the worst time of year for a bunch of light aircraft to be flying through Europe and then the South-East Asian monsoon. By way of comparison, although the Smith brothers didn't start the 1919 race until 12 November and arrived in Darwin on 10 December, contestants were allowed to start in that race any time after 8 September; and the 1934 race started on 20 October. The conduct of the race had only been approved by the federal government in May, so given the amount of planning to be done, a start before December probably wasn't possible anyway.

The finish of the UK–Adelaide section of the race was to be celebrated with an Air Race Ball for 600 in RACSA's Parafield hangar on 31 December, by which time the race committee was to have figured out the handicap times so the placings could be announced. The premier

and a host of notables, including the Lord Mayor and Lady Smith, Sir Keith Smith's widow, would then award the trophies the following day, and the Adelaide–Sydney section of the race would start at 7 am on Friday 2 January. To help contestants find Parafield, the DCA had installed a rotating beacon and a new flare path on the north–south runway.

The race garnered a fair amount of press during the period from August through to its completion. There was constant speculation about the likely number of entrants and where they came from, with initial pie-in-the-sky hopes of 600 gradually being tempered by reality. At the end of July⁷ Ted Acres was quoted as expecting ninety-seven from the US, fifty to 100 from the UK, and 200 from Australia, but as time went on the number continually shrank. Peter Bainbridge, an ex-RN Fleet Air Arm and Salisbury dentist who had had an unsuccessful shot at election to the RACSA committee, had a thirty-year-old Percival Proctor he planned to ship to the UK for the race and fly with Bob Burnett-Read and Des Leonard. The Proctor had already been a problem for RACSA, because Max West, RACSA's chief engineer, had



Piper Comanche VH-DOL in race colours at Parafield on 30 Dec 1969 [NK Daw].

agreed to overhaul it for which Bainbridge was very slow to pay, and when he did, with rubber cheques. However, it was too slow to meet the requirements to complete the Gatwick–Parafield section between the allowed dates of 17 to 29 December and the race committee refused him dispensation to start two days earlier, so his entry application was withdrawn. Ted Acres is quoted in the same article⁸ as hoping to enter a RACSA aircraft and two-man crew if a sponsor

could be found, but that came to nothing too. Whyalla produced a couple of entrants: Trevor Brougham, a Whyalla charter operator, with Dean Ryan in Trevor's Beech Bonanza, and two Whyalla doctors, G.B. Markey and J.L.F. Somogyi, in a Comanche. Trevor went on to be a prize winner as described further below, but the doctors dropped out for lack of a sponsor. On 10 November two young Adelaide commercial pilots, Rick Buchanan and Ian Britten Jones were reported⁹ as entering their Piper Comanche VH-DOL, one of two aircraft they used to operate their charter company, Transair Ltd, on flights as far afield as Indonesia. They were to leave Adelaide on 12 November on the long flight to Gatwick and they too went on to be prize winners.¹⁰

Entries supposedly were to close on 17 November, a month before the start, but on 19 November Peter Lloyd announced¹¹ the Australian national race committee would meet in

⁷ *The Advertiser*, 29 July 1969.

⁸ *The Advertiser*, 14 August 1969.

⁹ *The Advertiser*, 10 November 1969.

¹⁰ VH-DOL is now displayed in the SAAM.

¹¹ *The Advertiser*, 19 November 1969.

Adelaide on 27 November and the entry deadline had been extended to the end of November or early December. He was quoted as saying forty-three Australian entrants were expected, thirty-five European and possibly ten US. In the end, the official race program listed 114 entrants, of which sixty-three competed and fifty-nine finished the race through to Sydney. *Aircraft* magazine, in its February 1970 edition, described the race and listed all the statistics¹², but it left little doubt about what it thought of the press's hyperbole in calling it "The Great Air Race". *Aircraft* suggested this was more to fit headline space the official title of "The BP England–Australia Commemorative Air Race" did not lend itself to, rather than suggesting any real claim to greatness; and went on to suggest it could be viewed as "*just a sporting event, with little proved or achieved*". Having left that rather sour taste in our mouths, however, the magazine did acknowledge while "*Great*" was too strong a word, the race was history-making. It was "*the longest light aircraft race ever attempted, with the largest, most representative field of international competitors*".¹³

Anyway, after the twenty-four hour delay, the race started on 18 December with the first day group of thirty-two departures spread between Gatwick and Biggin Hill. Sir Francis Chichester, who had flown the route solo forty years before in a Gipsy Moth, waved off the first aircraft. The pre-race shrinkage described above had continued, so it was possible to telescope the planned three-day departures period into two. The weather was still shocking, with many of the aircraft only reaching Le Touquet and Nantes on the first day. One crew, Kandar Dodd of Executive Air Services in Essendon and Bernard Perner, a Pennsylvanian, flying an Aero Commander 500S on delivery to Executive Air Services, was lost somewhere over the Swiss Alps on the first day. Another, three pilots from the UK Red Arrows aerobatic team flying a Siai Marchetti SF260, was also lost. Both aircraft triggered extensive search and rescue efforts and the Red Arrows were located the next day having made an off-schedule landing in Italy, but Dodd and Perner were not found.

There was one contestant who consistently dominated the press coverage. Sheila Scott was a celebrity English pilot who had already flown single-handed around the world in 1966 – the first British pilot of either sex to do so – and was awarded an OBE in 1968. She went on to fly around the world a couple more times and eventually established more than 100 light aircraft records. She had been a seventeen-year-old nurse at Haslar Naval Hospital during the war, then had various small theatre, film and TV roles throughout the fifties. She was blonde and glamorous and obviously had a natural bent for publicity. Before the race even started she was generating column inches declaring "*Women pilots must be feminine*" and that she "*can't abide women pilots who think they have to wear greasy overalls and have dirty fingernails*".¹⁴ In the same article she described her planned "*capsule*" wardrobe for the race, which the International Wool Secretariat in London had helped her arrange and was made up of colour-coordinated wool layers of various shades of purple. She planned to layer-up for the cold flight through northern Europe then gradually strip off, even suggesting by the time she reached Australia she would be down to her purple briefs. Alas, that didn't happen.

¹² These race statistics are included here as Appendix H.

¹³ *Aircraft* magazine, February 1970, pp. 14–30.

¹⁴ *The Advertiser*, 4 December 1969.

This was nothing to the high drama to follow during the race. She really hit the news when it was reported on 23 December she had made a forced landing in her Comanche PA-24-260 on 21 December at Macassar¹⁵ in the Celebes, with complete communications and radio instruments failure. This was somewhat off the beaten track, which was the cause of much criticism later. However, after two days at Macassar she was able to get a cable off to the race committee in Darwin saying:

*Air race 99 desperate. No radio aid. No communication from island and cannot get through on cable system. [Evidently she did.] Aircraft is in open and deteriorating. Will try to get radio engineer and spares or trailing aerial. Assistance from Singapore only answer. Please keep in touch".*¹⁶

A later edition on the same day reported another cable saying:

All long-distance aids damaged during early stage of flight. Finally lost all VHF comms after take-off Singapore. Unable to return owing to overweight, air



Sheila Scott, immaculate in her purple pants suit after arrival at Parafield 29 December 1969 [Australian Womens Weekly, 21 January 1970].

traffic and weather. Headed for Australia, but beaten by weather over Timor Island and disorientated. Tried morse signals, which I believe were picked up as I heard words on HF. After I had given up all hope because of sharks, cloud lifted and showed runway at Macassar. People very kind. American missionary looking after me, but aircraft needs urgent radio engineering unless weather improves to enable me to fly visually to Australia. Monsoon rains getting into aircraft and frogs nibbling the tyres. Desperate to move aircraft and reach Adelaide in time. No HF aerial left at all but helicopter engineer from Djakarta may have spare, if we knew how to install it. Much wrong with aircraft electrics and

will need much work in Australia. Suspect VHF completely burnt out and Martin compass broken.

As if braving sharks and having your tyres nibbled by frogs (they later turned out to be dogs) wasn't enough, the drama was heightened further when the three intrepid Red Arrows in their little Siai-Marchetti, in an excess of chivalry, came to the rescue. They arranged for Sheila Scott to follow them to Koepang in Timor, then on to Darwin, and they diverted to fly

¹⁵ Now called Makasar, Indonesia.

¹⁶ *The News* (Adelaide), 24 December 1969.

over Macassar on Christmas Day so she could find them. That all turned pear-shaped when they flew into more monsoonal thunderstorms and got separated. Sheila managed to land at Sumbawa Island, a couple of islands east of Bali, and Flight Lieutenant Kingsley ended up on a beach on Flores Island, still further east along the chain. They had to offload the aircraft to lighten it, and Kingsley's two fellow crew members, Rhys Evans and Gibson, staggered six miles through the jungle to the only airstrip at Maumere on the north coast of the island. Kingsley then made a thoroughly hazardous full-power take-off along the beach and flew to Maumere to pick them up. They reached Darwin at 12:50 pm on 26 December.

The luckless Sheila Scott had landed at Sumbawa to find no fuel suitable for the Comanche was available. It wasn't until two days later on 27 December that an Indonesian commercial flight delivered some fuel from Bali for her, so making Parafield by midnight on 29 December was looking decidedly tight. She did, just, with about four hours to spare, impeccably groomed and resplendent in her purple pants suit. That wasn't the end of the drama, however. As soon as she landed, her aircraft was whisked into the DCA's hangar with a police escort, much to the disappointment of some 8,000 British migrants who had come out to meet her. This apparently was in response to a message she sent from Darwin to Peter Lloyd saying she suspected her aircraft had been sabotaged and feared for her life and wanted police protection. She denied most of this after she arrived, saying she merely wanted to ensure her aircraft was protected – perhaps anticipating a

Vimy-style tumultuous welcome at Parafield. She was fifty-sixth out of the fifty-eight finishers, but being the only all-woman crew in the race, she won the Ford Motor Company's \$5,000 prize as the *"all-women's crew achieving the best performance between London and Sydney"*. As for the Red Arrows, they placed last, fifty-eighth on handicap, but still with an actual flight time London–Sydney over sixty-six hours less than Sheila's.

Meanwhile, RACSA had been busy at Parafield. Graham Alderman had based the assignment of his volunteers on the estimated race times of the contestants, which meant he didn't expect the first arrivals until Boxing Day. It's not clear why, because the race organisers planned the arrival stream between 22 to 29 December, or from the 23rd after the twenty-four hour delay departing London. In reality, the first arrival, NSW entrants W.J. Campbell



Graham Alderman and his assistant, Helen Sinclair, hard at work during the race [SAAM Collection].

and N.C.T. Blackhouse in their Twin Comanche, was at 9:08 pm on Sunday 21 December. Graham was able to “*slip the machinery into gear early*”¹⁷ and they were ready. Only three minutes later, South Australians Trevor Brougham and Dean Ryan crossed the line in a Beech 36 Bonanza, and then two more before midnight. There were 15,000 people at the aerodrome to meet them and 2,500 of them stayed until 3 am hoping for more. RACSA didn’t close the bar until 4:30 am.



“Pilot’s Log Book” published and circulated by The News for fans to log the progress of contestants [SAAM Collection].

Rick Buchanan and Ian Britten Jones in Comanche VH-DOL arrived just after midnight at 00:08 am on 22 December and there were thirty more arrivals that day. They had had a particularly rough time between Singapore and Darwin and had to land at Koepang in Timor for fuel, but they made only four landings more than the mandatory seven. That was fewer than twenty-eight other contestants, some of whom made up to thirteen landings. Britten Jones had said when he was interviewed after arrival, that the Koepang stop “*could have cost us the race. But who cares. We didn’t go in it to win. Just for the laughs. The first bit across Europe wasn’t too good, although we went round the worst of the weather. Then we had a hell of a night on Saturday, with thunderstorms and rubbish*”.¹⁸ I think it’s fairly obvious they actually did indeed want to win. They certainly set the Comanche up for racing. They installed a new 260 hp Lycoming engine de-rated to 250 specifications and removed the rear seats to make room for a webbed

banana lounge for crew rest, ration boxes and an aluminium fifty-gallon fuel tank. This gave them a total of 150 gallons, or endurance of about thirteen to fourteen hours at best power. They had had to cut a hole in the rear panel to allow the resting pilot’s feet to protrude into the empennage.¹⁹ There was a lot of criticism by the Australian entrants of the DCA’s regulation of them, which *Aircraft* magazine highlighted: “... *some others noted maximum permissible fuel overload variations as an extra handicap to Australians, restricted by the highly safety-conscious Australian DCA to a max 10%, while other nationals were much less*

¹⁷ Royal Aero Club of South Australia, *Wing Tips*, “After the Air Race”, February 1970, p. 1.

¹⁸ *The News* (Adelaide), 22 December 1969.

¹⁹ Ian Britten Jones, letter to David Byrne, SAAM, 15 April 2015.

rigidly governed in this range-increasing area”.²⁰ After the race Rick Buchanan was reported as saying: “some Australian entrants had competed illegally”. The report went on to say: “he had flown in the race without having his inside fuel tanks passed by the DCA”. And “DCA regulations had not only been strict, but also idiotic. I want to go on record as saying that I was most unhappy with the red tape involved with this race”.²¹ Fortunately, this outspokenness did not result in any DCA action and they finished the race in tenth place overall, which won them the second prize of \$2,000 in Class A Single-Engined Piston Aircraft of less than 5,000 lb AWW.



Beech A36 VH-TYZ flown by Trevor Brougham and Dean Ryan at Parafield on 1 Jan 1970 before their ill-fated Parafield-Sydney sector
[NK Daw]

Parafield arrivals continued all week, with fifty-six contestants on the ground before the deadline of midnight on 29 December. Five more were given a twenty-four-hour extension to allow them to finish, and the last two arrived after that deadline and so failed to qualify. The ball on New Year's Eve was judged to be a big success, although 200 guests who hadn't registered an intention to attend showed up, which resulted in the food being inadequate. The prize presentation the next day went a bit awry because protests had been lodged for second and

third place in the London–Adelaide section, which hadn't been resolved. Second place was the \$5,000 City of Adelaide prize, and the Lord Mayor, who was to present it, was quoted as saying “I feel like a bride-groom at the altar who hasn't a finger to put a ring on”.²²

The Adelaide–Sydney final sector was supposed to start at 7:30 am the next day, but the weather at Parafield and through to Sydney was shocking. There were “dust storms, torrential rain, snow, hail, wind and cold”.²³ Snow in January? The report did refer to it as freak weather, but either it was extraordinarily freakish or this perhaps referred to the higher elevations! Another twenty-four-hour delay was considered, but in the end the start was set back two and a half hours and the first aircraft departed at 10 am on Friday 2 January. Departures continued through until 1:35 pm, with arrivals in Bankstown after the mandatory stop in Griffith expected to be around 6 pm. It wasn't to be. The weather in Griffith deteriorated to the point the airport had to be closed at 3:20 pm and seven aircraft diverted to Narrandera, fifty kilometres south-east of Griffith; one to Wagga Wagga, another fifty kilometres further south-east; and another landed in a paddock at Goolgowi, fifty kilometres to the north-west. Trevor Brougham and Dean Ryan would have been in

²⁰ *Aircraft* magazine, February 1970, p. 14.

²¹ *The News* (Adelaide), 23 December 1969.

²² *The Advertiser*, 2 January 1970.

²³ *The Advertiser*, 3 January 1970.

Griffith before the closure and in the running for the London–Sydney prizes, but they decided to land in a paddock nearby because of the number of aircraft waiting to land at Griffith ahead of them and their low fuel state. Sadly, that was the end of their race, because the aircraft hit a storm drain hidden by stubble and bent the nose wheel back, so they had to be content with the \$2,500 prize in the London–Adelaide section for third place on handicap.

By the time the weather improved enough for the diverted aircraft to return to Griffith for the last sector to Bankstown, and the Adelaide–Griffith times were sorted out, the race was two days late, so that the finish wasn't until Sunday 4 January. It was a spectacular finish, with fifty-nine aircraft landing at Bankstown within thirty-two minutes – a landing on average every thirty-three seconds. The prize ceremony was scheduled for the following night, but not all the prizes could be awarded, because four crews were still in dispute: over the Captain Cook Bi-Centennial prize of \$10,000 and the NSW Government Trophy for the fastest time on handicap over the entire course, as well as the Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith

second prize of \$5,000 and the City of Adelaide Trophy for second place on handicap over the London–Adelaide section. The protests weren't decided until ten days after the race. The biggest winners were Englishmen Bill Bright and Frank Buxton, who used the race to deliver a Britten-Norman BN-2 Islander to Aerial Tours of Papua New Guinea. They won a total of \$45,750 for the BP Australia prize and Prime Minister's Trophy for the highest number of aggregate points scored over the entire course (\$25,000), the Sir Ross and Keith Smith prize and the SA Government Trophy as the winner on handicap of the



The winner - Britten-Norman BN-2 Islander flown by Bill Bright and Frank Buxton at Parafield on 29 Dec 1969. They were very quick to apply the decal saying "Winners of London-Adelaide Air Race" under the registration! [NK Daw].

London–Adelaide section (\$10,000), and the *Daily Express* prize and trophy (£5,000 or \$10,750) for the fastest time to Sydney by a UK-resident crew flying a British Commonwealth-built aircraft. The last was a bit of an embarrassment, because although there were eighteen UK-resident crews among the qualifiers, only two flew British Commonwealth-built aircraft, both Britten-Norman Islanders.

Another English crew won the other major prize – T.E. Lampitt and Roy Bartman won the \$10,000 Captain Cook Bicentennial prize and NSW Government Trophy for the fastest time over both sections in their Beech 99A. NSW crew W.J. Campbell and N.C.T Blackhouse in a Twin Comanche won the \$5,000 disputed Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith second prize when the protest was dismissed. They also won the City of Darwin Trophy for being the first aircraft into Darwin – and they were the first aircraft into Parafield, as already mentioned. Oh, and

the Qantas Hawker Siddeley HS-125 beat the Canadian Armed Forces Dassault Falcon by nearly two hours in the special category jet speed race for the Jet Aircraft Trophy.

All in all, twelve out of thirty-one Australian crews who finished won prizes totalling \$30,500, and five out of the eighteen UK crews won a total of \$67,750. In addition to these, another \$9,000 was awarded to US, Norwegian and Irish entrants. As far as the South Australians were concerned, no RACSA aircraft competed, and Trevor Brougham and Dean Ryan, and Rick Buchanan and Ian Britten Jones ended up being the only ones in the money.

I'll give the last word to *Aircraft* magazine, which suggested, notwithstanding the prolific and enthusiastic press reporting from May 1969 onwards, the race demonstrated "*a lack of public excitement, partly induced and partly mirrored in meagre pre-race publicity and build-up; the long break in Adelaide that robbed the last leg to Sydney of some of its impact as the climax of a big international event; [and] some other evidence of rushed planning*".²⁴ On second thoughts, perhaps the last word should be that most of this criticism can be put down to the very late agreement of the Commonwealth Government to participate in and approve the race, and the unwise decision to extend the race to Sydney to commemorate the Captain Cook Bi-Centennial, requiring such unsuitable race dates. Sadly, too, there was little acknowledgement of RACSA's role either as the originator of the race concept or as the organiser of all the activity at Parafield between the race sections.

Mike Milln
History Group

October 2018

(Adapted from Chapter 35 - *Wing Tips – The story of the Royal Aero Club of South Australia Book 2* by Mike Milln, Avonmore Books 2018)

²⁴ *Aircraft* magazine, February 1979, p. 30.