contributed by Warren Butler

When your new plane arrives

Having made the decision, parted with the money, and patiently counted down the days until delivery, it's a happy time when your new aircraft arrives in port. Earlier this year Warren Butler's new Foxbat A32 was delivered in Auckland fresh from the Aeroprakt factory in the Ukraine. Warren wrote an excellent article at the time for his local club which caught our eye. He's put 50 hours on the hobbs since then and now shares that flying experience, as well as the excitement of the acquisition process, with KiwiFlyer readers. Here's a taste of how a successful purchase, delivery and registration process comes together:

The Foxbat A32 is the latest aircraft from the Aeroprakt stable.

I WAS pretty excited when the container arrived at the transfer facility in East Tamaki where the seal was broken and the doors opened. Inside was a shiny new Foxbat A32 – a first of type here in NZ. After the MAF inspection, the container was delivered to Mercer Airfield where it was carefully unpacked ready for assembly. I can truly say that the chaps at the factory in Kiev, Ukraine, spared no effort to safely and securely pack everything in such a way that there was not a scratch anywhere, just as you would hope for. The pile of left-over bubble wrap and padding was a sight to behold. The wings were snugly fitted into metal frames, bolted to the sides of the fuselage. The all-moving tailplane had its own cradle, also bolted onto one wing frame. All of the loose bits such as fairings, prop blades, cockpit storage units, paperwork, etc., were bubble-wrapped and fitted into the huge zippered baggage compartment behind the seats. Childhood memories of unpacking the best Christmas presents came to mind! The Aeroprakt agent Doug King and I carefully identified and laid out all the parts ready for assembly. We started with attaching the wings which was pretty straight forward. Fuel tank plumbing and strobe connections were next. The rudder went on afterwards together with the linkages. The all-moving tailplane looked like a complex piece of work but after giving it much thought, we assembled it with no problems.

Doug King (L) with Warren Butler.

WCB's traditional panel. Dynon glass is an option.

There are quite a few instrument panel configurations to choose from and I have to confess that the Dynon option was pretty tempting. Since I prefer to fly 'eyes outside,' I stuck with traditional steam gauges. Cockpits can easily be filled with electronic features and functions, bells and whistles. But I cannot imagine our Mark One-Eyeball being used outside the cockpit as much as I prefer, when all these colourful and exciting distractions are installed.

I opted for a Trig TY91 VHF radio and TT21 transponder which we fitted next. Corrie De Bruin was a champ at installing the transponder and its associated bits and bobs. Next came the fuel computer from MGL Avionics. From the reviews I read, this little gem is very useful on long cross-country trips. After calibrating a fuel tank dip tube, the fuel flow check was next, all to specification.

Ready to go

The chaps from CAA came and did their inspection and all was in order. Then we fitted the fairings and wheeled the aircraft across to a clear area for the first start in New Zealand. I say this since all new aircraft are test flown at the factory to ensure correctness of rigging and everything else. They are then de-rigged and shipped to the customer. We chose a mowed area and tied down the tail. I thought it a good idea to empty the carb bowls and add some fresh fuel. With both mags off, I cranked the starter for a few seconds and the oil pressure quickly came up. Mags and choke went on and she jumped to life. After the required warm-up, a few 30 second bursts of full power revealed expected rpm, temps and pressures so all appeared good in that department. It was time for taxi trials. I taxied up and down the Mercer grass runway with the brakes partially applied to assist in bedding them in. On the into wind leg it was ever so tempting to just lighten the load somewhat but I thought that was best left to the very capable hands of Jim Lyver.

After shut-down and another thorough inspection, it was time for Jim to do his test flight. Jim taxied down to the end of 27 while Doug and I waited at the opposite end. Jim was obviously satisfied with everything since what we thought was going to be a high speed taxi, culminated in a take-off. What a sight, to see this familiar, but slightly different shape, soar high over our heads, sounding as sweet as ever. He headed south of the circuit and we saw him do a few turns to get the feel of the new aeroplane. After the required two hours of flying as per CAA requirements for new aircraft, he was soon on downwind. His approach seemed a bit high and the touch down point a bit deep and around he went again. Another circuit and this time it was a full stop. He beckoned for me to join him in the right seat so in I jumped. He had a pretty solemn look on his face and as soon as I had my headset on, he looked at me and said: "I think we have a problem here." Well, nobody in aviation

likes to hear those words! Then he said the problem was that I would have to struggle to wrench him out of the left seat! Phew! Off we went for some performance comparisons. The take-off was as brisk as with the A22, climbing away at 1300 ft/min and 65 kts - and we were pretty close to maximum all up weight. Impressive. Equally impressive was levelling out at 1500 ft, still full throttle. 80 kts whizzed past, so did 90. 100 came up pretty quickly and within a few seconds so did 110. Easing on to 115, I thought we were just about there but no, 120 kts was clearly indicated. We decided not to go further than 124 kts which is VNE even though I felt there was a bit more left in her. She was flying as if on rails, steady and oh-so-smooth. Word from the factory is that they are busy with tests which will allow 135 kts as the future VNE.

Jim let me take control for a few turns and some slow flight. I was amazed that elevator trim hardly needed adjustment during different phases of flight. The all flying tailplane provides for an extremely powerful elevator right down to the stall - but not overly sensitive either. Time for some stalls now, so we slowed down to around 50 kts, applied both notches of flap and eased the power down to idle. As the speed bled off, the ailerons still held their grip, as well as a good stable pitch response. We did a few stalls and consistently came to 27 kts indicated each time. The yoke showed distinctive signs of buffeting a few knots before the stall and there was no tendency to drop a wing. The 3 deg of washout in the wings was looking like a good design characteristic. Now it was time to land. Downwind in the circuit I let the speed decay to 75 kts where flaps 1 was selected. On the base leg at 700 ft AGL I decided to turn final and add flaps 2. We looked pretty high so I closed the throttle – ok, the throttle was already closed and we were still high. Needed a bit of elevator trim to balance the forces. The only way to bleed off speed as I know it, is to add all the flap you can, throttle to idle and ease back on the yoke for a steady 55 kt approach speed. I did all of the above and still we were aiming for about two thirds down the runway! Unless we hit some necessary sink, a go-around would be the only option. We ended up way faster than the recommended 45 kts over the fence but since Mercer has a long runway, I held off for a very long while before the speed bled off enough to allow the mains to settle. Lesson learned: This aircraft is quite slippery and approach speeds need to be kept well under control. We did a touch-and-go on that one and the next downwind leg was extended a wee bit longer for my second landing. I allowed the speed and height to decay a little more before settling on finals and still, we looked a little high, even at flaps 2 and throttle at idle. Over the fence at 50kts this time. The elevator during the flare takes some getting used to but is very predictable and smooth all the way.

50 hours in

Now that I have around 50 hours under my belt on the A32, I have determined some fuel consumption figures. During circuit training, I am averaging around 11 litres per hour. Cruising at around 115kts, I am averaging 16 lph. 90 litres all up is plenty for allowing some decent cross-country flying. It's been apparent over winter that the cabin heater is a very handy feature. A panel mounted knob operates a pivoted vane in the air tunnel under the engine, directing warmed air downstream of the radiator into the cockpit. Cabin heat also helps a lot with demisting the inside of the windows when necessary.

Will the A32 replace the A22? I don't think so since they are quite different with the A22 suiting the more rugged rough field user (having bigger tyres and no spats) and the A32 more at home on faster cruises and longer trips. There is also another version of the A22 available in Australia called the Kelpie. It has bigger tyres and prop, a tool bay (or dog kennel), and is perfectly suited to rugged and remote areas. The extra seat-back map pockets are a winner, as are the extra storage compartments on either side of the instrument panel. The baggage compartment is rated the same at 20 kg as on the A22 but is a lot bigger. I added some extra foam insulation under the carpeted cockpit flooring and I am sure this has helped to keep things even more quiet inside. Folk on the ground say that the A32 is significantly quieter than the A22 so maybe the additional streamlining also has something to do with that. With 6.5hrs endurance, the A32's range with reserve is an impressive 1350 km, so I'm really looking forward to some long cross-country trips and South Island visits.

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