



Record Breakers

Avians & the Australian connection

by Jim Grant



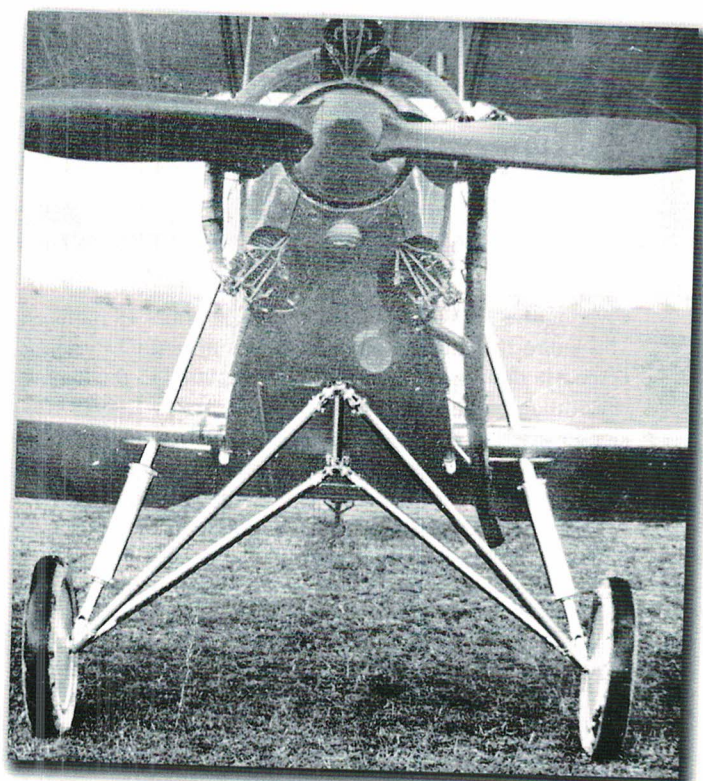
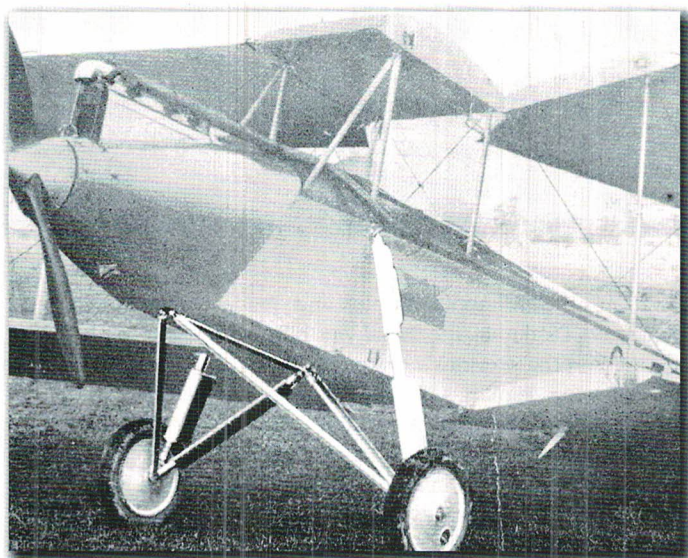
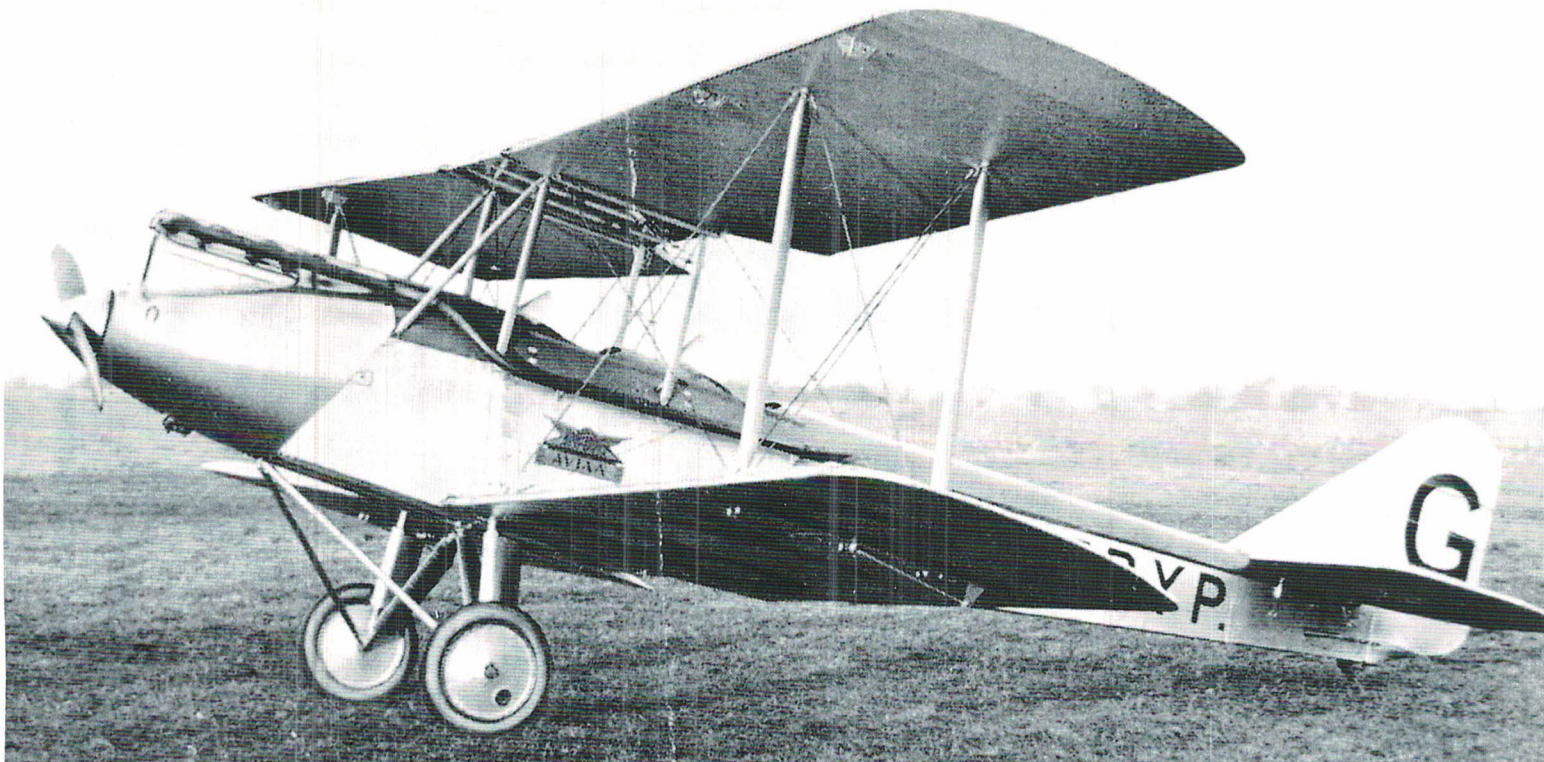
■ IN COMPARISON WITH THE D.H.60 MOTH, WHICH enjoyed great success in Australia, the Avro Avian attracted only a modest amount of interest but amongst those which came here were a number of very interesting aircraft. A total of 31 Avians were imported into Australia and the first one, G-AUFY, was delivered to Adelaide on 6th January 1928 on board the SS Otaki.

Two of Australia's most famous pilots, Bert Hinkler and Charles Kingsford-Smith, flew these aircraft as did Jim Broadbent, who is now virtually forgotten, but was the darling of the Australian public in the 1930s. Surprisingly the prototype Avian, the aircraft used by Bert Hinkler for the first solo flight to Australia, has survived the years and is now on display in the Queensland Museum in Brisbane. The other top flight record breaker, (Sir) Charles Kingsford-Smith, flew two Avians. His first aircraft G-ABCF was an Avian IVA named 'Southern Cross Junior' in which he set a new United Kingdom to Australia record time of 9 days 21 hours in October 1930 and thereafter

sold his aircraft in Australia. Piloted by Guy Menzies the still British registered 'Southern Cross Junior' flew out of Mascot Aerodrome on 7th January 1931 on a flight to New Zealand. He successfully completed the 1,235 miles (2,000km) in 12 hours 15 minutes, but the aircraft crashed while landing on soft ground. This was the first solo crossing of the Tasman Sea. The aircraft was shipped back to Australia, sold to A.E. Jones and was allocated the registration VH-UPT. However it was destroyed, killing the owner and the pilot, on 12th April 1931 when the port wing folded back whilst in flight and the Avian spun in.

Charles Kingsford-Smith bought a second Avian, VH-UQG, a Mk-V single seat version which he named 'Southern Cross Minor', and with this aircraft started on an Australia to United Kingdom flight on 21st September 1931. He was making good progress and had a fair chance of breaking the record when he became ill over Turkey and following an unauthorised landing he was detained by the Turkish authorities. Despite this he almost equalled the previous record!

ABOVE Bert Hinkler standing in front of G-EBOV. (©Aviation Heritage Museum of Western Australia) **OPPOSITE TOP** A view of G-EBYP showing the wing struts and centre section **LEFT** The wing folding system **RIGHT** A close-up of the undercarriage



In 1933 W.N. Lancaster made a record attempt on the United Kingdom to South Africa route. However he went missing in the Sahara Desert in April 1933 and the remains of the aircraft, and the pilot, were not discovered until 12th February 1962. The remains of the aircraft were brought back to Australia and the unrestored remains displayed in the Queensland Museum.

Jim Broadbent also used an Avian to good effect when he made a 7,600 mile (12,300km) circumnavigation of Australia in August/September 1931 in VH-UQE, a sports Avian, in 7 days, 8 hours and 15 minutes.

The real prize is the Avian G-EBOV in the Queensland Museum which began life as the Avro 581 Avian (retrospectively the Avian I) prototype. This was a derivative of the Avro 576 and a very different aircraft from the Avian II and later marks. This aircraft originally had a silver fuselage with wings and tailplane left in clear varnished fabric. Hinkler's flight from the UK to Australia was the first time that a solo flight had been made over this route. Alterations carried out to the aircraft prior to the flight included a headrest which contained a life raft (and paddles) and an extended exhaust pipe to keep

fumes well clear of the pilot. The date of G-EBOV's first flight is unknown, however it appeared at the 1926 Light Aircraft Competition held at Lympne between September 10th and 18th, 1926. Over three days Hinkler flew 1,074 miles (1,730km) in the aircraft, however it was eliminated from the competition when the magneto failed and the aircraft had to make a forced landing. Following the competition it had its wing span reduced by four feet (1.3 metres), was given extra fin and rudder area and fitted with an 85hp ADC Cirrus II inline engine which increased the overall length of the fuselage. These modifications resulted in it being redesignated as the Avro 581A and it was purchased by Hinkler who began his record breaking career with a win at the Bournemouth Easter (1927) Airshow. On 27th August 1927 he flew to Riga, Latvia,



covering the 1,200 miles (1,932km) in 10 hours 45 minutes. This indirectly led to an order for Avians from the Latvian Air Force. He then had a split undercarriage fitted to the aircraft which then became an Avro 581E. On February 7, 1928 Hinkler departed from Croydon Airfield and arrived in Darwin fifteen and a half days, 128 flying hours and 11,005 miles (17,720km) later. Accompanied by his wife he made an extensive tour around Australia. When he returned to the United Kingdom he left the Avian with his family and they subsequently donated it to the Queensland Museum. He was

awarded the Britannia Trophy and made an Honorary Squadron Leader in the Royal Australian Air Force for his efforts over the previous six months.

Following Hinkler's flight Wakefield Oil donated two Avians to the Australian Avro Club (New South Wales Section). The first was G-AUHC in April 1928, followed by G-AUHK in July. In November 1928 G-AUHK was fitted with a radio set in a trial which eventually led to the fitting of radios in all Aero Club aircraft.

On 12th September 1928 E. J. Stephens started a firm





Kidby and made its 'first flight' on April 24th, 1998. Kirby planned to make a re-enactment of Bert Hinkler's Avian flight to Australia, however on 7th July 1998 whilst in the United Kingdom awaiting the start of the commemorative flight, the aircraft crashed while landing at a small airfield. It was very badly damaged, but with a major effort by six aircraft restoration firms it was again flying on the 3rd September 1998 and started out from Farnborough for Australia on 10th September. He arrived at Darwin on 25th October much delayed by bureaucracy, bad weather and a split fuel tank. On his return Kidby sought buyers for the aircraft but it was not until early in

2001 that one appeared. He was an American who wished to carry out a re-enactment of the first return flight across the United States which had been made by Amelia Erhardt. The aircraft now has the registration NC7083, which was the one used by the original Avian (c/n 101), the first production Avian III. **AM**

References

- Avro Aircraft, ©Putnam
- Aeroplane Monthly, September 1998
- North-West Aerial Frontier by Ted Wixted
- Classic Wings Downunder, Issue 18
- Australian Aviation, November 1998, June and July 2001

ABOVE Avro 594 Avian IIIA G-EBYP fresh off the production line

BELOW Hinkler (on left) with G-EBOV in the background (©Aviation Heritage Museum of Western Australia)

