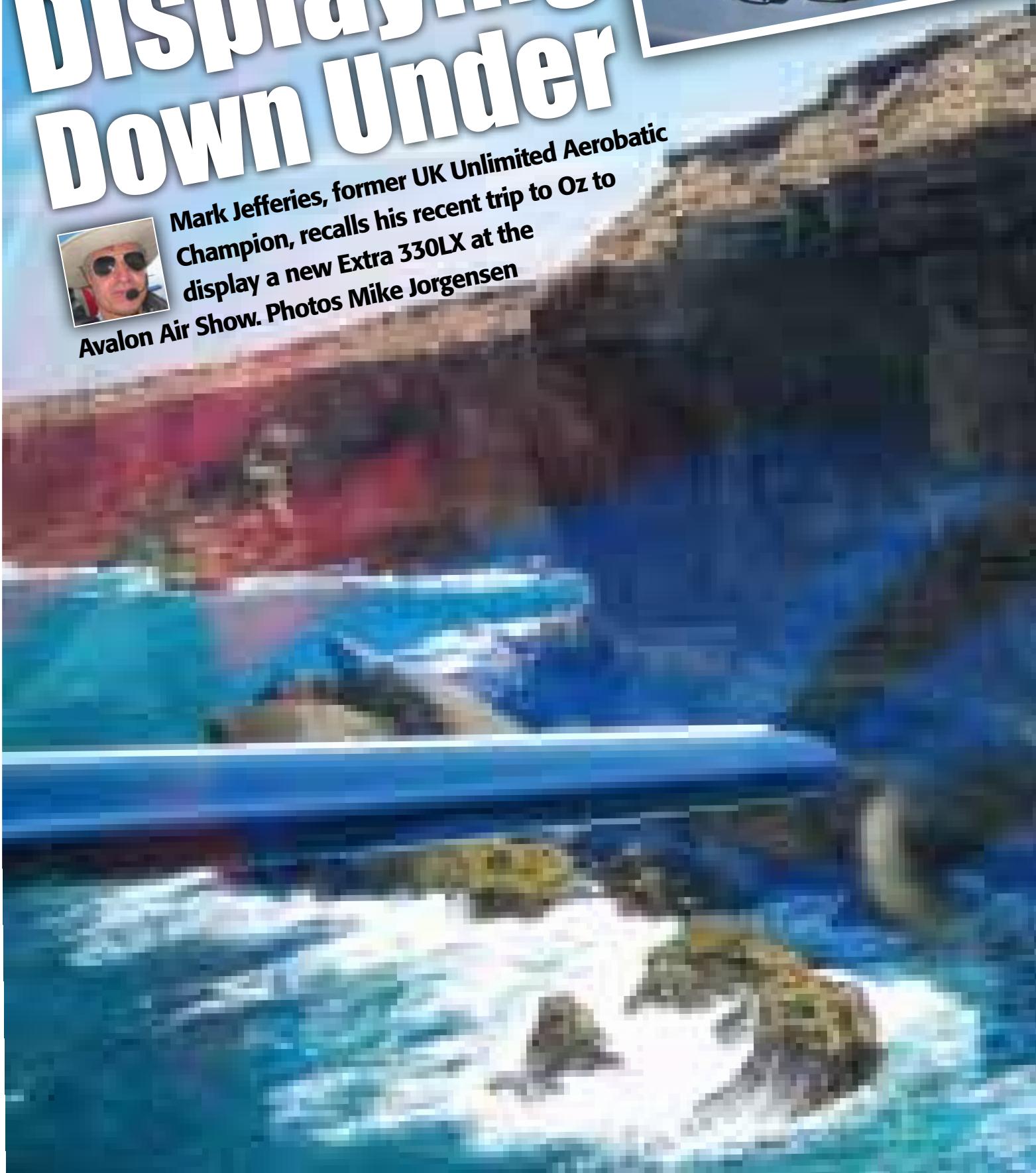
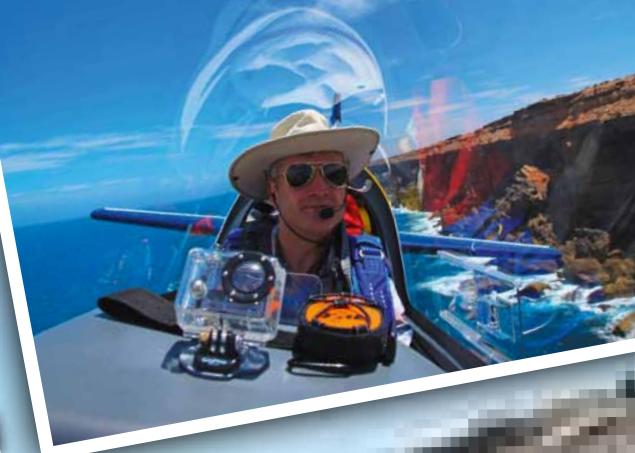


# Displaying Down Under



Mark Jefferies, former UK Unlimited Aerobatic Champion, recalls his recent trip to Oz to display a new Extra 330LX at the Avalon Air Show. Photos Mike Jorgensen



**W**hen the phone call came, towards the end of 2012, it all seemed so very simple! Fly 20 hours on a big bird to Perth, Western Australia, collect an Extra 330LX, fly it 1,660nm to Avalon, near Melbourne, and display the aircraft for four days in front of massive crowds at the southern hemisphere's largest airshow, Avalon 2013. No problem!

Wind the clock back to 1993. I was due to take my Lazer 200 down to Grosseto in Italy to compete with the British Team in the World Aerobatic Championships. I had only finished building the aircraft two years earlier and was doing my utmost to look after my pride and joy. Then I received a call from the South African Team Manager, Brian Zeederberg, asking if I would be prepared to let one of his Team members – Dieter Ebeling – borrow my

aircraft for these World Championships. In return, I would borrow Dieter's for the forthcoming 1st Advanced World Aerobatic Championship in 1995, to be held in South Africa. Of course, I agreed.

After the event, I kept in touch with Dieter. He sold his own Lazer in 1995 and put aerobatics on hold. This was to enable him to concentrate on expanding his already well-established business, Awesome Aviation ([www.awesoméaviation.net](http://www.awesoméaviation.net)).

Dieter chose to relocate from South Africa and didn't fancy our wonderful UK weather, so instead settled into Perth, Western Australia. He successfully broke into the Australian aviation business leasing King Air, Beech 1900 and special mission jets within Australia, Africa and the Middle East with offices at Perth Airport in Western Australia and Lanseria Airport in Johannesburg.

Jump forward to the summer of 2011. Dieter is travelling home with his son from Oshkosh and has twelve hours to kill during a short stop in London, so I went down and had lunch with them. During the conversation it emerged that Dieter had been missing aerobatics and was looking to purchase a brand-new Extra 330LX – which was duly delivered at the end of 2011. Dieter assembled the aircraft upon delivery.

Later came the invitation from Dieter to display the Awesome Extra 330LX at Avalon – an invitation that I just couldn't refuse. However, in order to display anywhere in Oz, I would need to obtain the appropriate CASA licences and approvals before it could happen. It was to be a painstaking exercise involving lots of paper, telephone calls and time, all undertaken by Joel Haski – [redbaron.com.au](http://redbaron.com.au)

(Main photo, top and left) Low-level along the Great Australian Bight





He made it all happen and a very big thank you is due to him.

First, and unlike our very own CAA, I had expected that a Level 4 English would be sufficient, but CASA insisted on Level 6. Our own CAA was able to provide the test along with the necessary documentation, so I travelled down to Gatwick and the matter was quickly resolved.

In January 2013, I found myself en route to Perth via Doha, on a Qatar Airways Boeing 777 out of Heathrow. I managed to blag one of the more spacious (relatively speaking that is) emergency exit seats. Thankfully, I seem to have an uncanny knack of sleeping well on aircraft and this trip was no exception. The following afternoon I arrived in Perth. Dieter collected me from the airport and we went straight to his house, located on the coast overlooking the Indian Ocean. With a careful use of melatonin, good blackout curtains and silence, I managed to lessen the deadly jet-lag.

The first two or three days were spent with Dieter practising, while I supervised – initially with competition aerobatics, but later with freestyle manoeuvres. While undertaking these flights, it became apparent that bush fires were particularly prevalent in and around the area and we witnessed many. Six single-seat water bombers were located at Jandakot – their well-coordinated activities proving effective in the battle. We were able to operate over the coast and by utilising the services of Perth Centre we had a traffic advisory service and listening watch.

There was the small matter of getting my CAA Display Authority recognised by CASA. I had

hoped to deal with this while still in the UK but it was not possible. Following three days of practice, it was time to validate the CASA Waiver for aerobatics below 3,000ft. Gary Criddle flew in from Sydney – a five-hour each-way trip! CASA operates the low-level waiver in much the same way as our own CAA, but it was their process I had to go through before being allowed to display at Avalon. Gary spent a morning with me. Following an interview and an evaluation flight, he declared himself 'satisfied' and issued the paperwork. Now everything was in place to fly to and display at Avalon.

### Self-service dirt strips

The next day, VH-IXN, our Awesome Extra 330LX had a fifty-hour check, completed by a licensed engineer. The next task was planning the transit flight and appropriate survival equipment. The

aircraft was fitted with a 406 MHz ELT along with a spot tracker, enabling the support team to monitor the aircraft's progress on the web. Other items included ten litres of water, aluminium foil (for emergency reflectors), dental floss (very strong thread), a small and a large knife, special matches, some simple first aid and a pack of condoms (for the storage of water). A sunhat and a stick-on sunshade completed the equipment.

Mike Jorgenson accompanied me on the trip. Mike is a native Aussie and I was sure his local knowledge would come in handy. The aircraft was loaded to gross weight, with 187 litres of fuel – good for three hours plus a small reserve if we cruise at 2,300rpm and 22in at 9,500ft in the cool air. With much of the trip being in the area of the Roaring Forties, we were expecting a tailwind. We weren't to be disappointed – on one stretch the GPS indicated 215kt groundspeed.

To make the ferry trip more of a pleasurable experience, we planned legs of around two hours, spread over three days and there is a three-hour time shift from Jandakot to our destination to factor in. It could easily be done over two days, but why rush?

Day 1 saw us set out for the 2hr 5min leg to Esperance. It was the only cloudy day of the trip – typical! There was even a small rain shower. That said, it did keep the temperatures down slightly, so I had to be grateful for small mercies. We routed direct. While it was all very pretty, there was little to see on this leg. However, we spotted a few dirt strips, used mainly by the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). Pretty much all of the Australian



**Practice along the Perth coastline**



**Parking alongside  
a Royal Flying  
Doctor's PC-12 at  
Port Augusta**



**(Left) Melissa Pemberton and Skip Stewart of the USA team use an impressive backdrop for their display**

**(Right) Final to land at Avalon**

**Below) Looking back at the Great Australian Bight**



airfields operate on a Unicom basis, much the same way as our American cousins do. You just prefix and end your transmission with the name of the airfield you are talking to – simple! It effectively provides pilot-controlled separation. What it does mean is that there is usually someone listening on the frequency, reassuring in some of the more remote areas.

Our stay at the dirt strip of Esperance was brief. Like most of the airstrips across Australia, refuelling is a self-service arrangement using a BP Credit Card as payment. We saw only two people during our visit here. After refuelling we had time for a drink and a snack before departing for Forest – another leg of around two hours – and our planned night stop.

This leg was across the Nullarbor Plain and we planned to fly at 10,000ft. The Nullarbor Plain is part of the area of flat, almost treeless, arid country of southern Australia. For us, high above the ground, the en route scenery was often barren but spectacular.

Forest is unusual among airfields in Australia. It is one of very few privately owned, ex-military airfields and is equipped with an NDB and a single hangar. It's alongside the longest stretch of straight railway in Oz. Due to its desolate location, it has a resident airfield manager who completes a 12-month stint at the airfield. The 'town' consists of six bungalows, all next to the runway, which sees between one and twenty movements a month. But the population is just three – the

airfield manager, his wife and a single employee! When visiting airfields like Forest, it's customary to arrive bearing gifts – a newspaper and fresh fruit are always appreciated.

We stayed in one of the bungalows and had a wonderful evening meal on the veranda, cooked by the manager's wife. During the meal, the conversation moved on to dangerous spiders and the airfield manager grabbed a powerful torch and shone it around the immediate area. Less than 10 metres from our table were numerous pairs of eyes from the deadly trapdoor spiders – as well as five dingoes a little further away, eating one of their dead colleagues.

For Day 2, we had planned a 10am start – that was until a Bristol's helicopter crew arrived and we chatted with them. Departure slipped to 11am. Our next destination was Ceduna and we planned a slight detour to view the Great Australian Bight. It meant we would be flying with desert to our left and the coastline to our right – the flat desert is 150ft amsl with a rugged clifftop down to the water below; clearly a case of desert to the left and sharks to the right!

It was spectacular, but I must admit to feeling just a little unnerved at the time. The desert is empty and you are on your own. While flying along the coastline, the nearest landmass to the south is Antarctica! Once past the Great Australian Bight, it becomes golden sandy beaches – for mile upon mile – although we didn't witness a single person on any stretch of the beach throughout this leg! That said, the en route scenery proved well worth the slight detour.

The flight to Ceduna took us just 1hr 45min. The isolation continued as we didn't see a single person at the airfield. There was just time to refuel using the auto system and take on a little food – high-protein bars, nuts and dried fruit from the survival pack. It was just as well we had this sustenance in the survival pack as no food was available on the airfield.

### **Bees knees**

Next stop on the journey was Port Augusta, a city on the east coast of the Eyre Peninsula, at the head of Spencer Gulf. Once again, the scenery was changing. Instead of just a barren desert, occasional arable farming areas appeared – although there was still mile-upon-mile of sand dunes separating the landmass from the sea. There were few, if any, places to complete a forced landing. The beaches appeared to be soft sand, the desert was scrub and rocks – and the few roads were unmade and single-track.

## FLYING ADVENTURE Displaying Down Under

After landing at Port Augusta, we parked alongside one of the RFDS Pilatus PC-12 aircraft on the ramp – it was the only other aircraft here. We refuelled using the, now standard, automated system. After crossing a time zone, we had to alter our watches by 2.5 hours. Apparently, the politicians' view is that the time change is required to ensure that you wear out your curtains and the animals are more comfortable with the time of milking. Politicians eh! Don't you just love them!

We spent the night at Port Augusta and were booked into a nice hotel complete with swimming pool – luxury! That was until a swarm of bees, located on the wall of a nearby house, decided to attack both Jorgy and myself. We made a hasty retreat! Despite the excitement, I slept well.

On Day 3, our first leg was planned to Horsham, a city located on the Wimmera River

and approximately 190 miles northwest of Melbourne. On this leg we saw our first hills; up until now things had been completely flat! It was also an area of arable farming and massive nature reserves fenced off like the Eastern Bloc used to be. During this leg, we crossed the South Australia/Victoria border and had another 30min time change.

Then a strange sight appeared. It was a very large area of salt flats. As we flew on, we could see a series of tyre tracks running in very straight lines. Was this a high speed test track; for the *Thrust SST* or similar perhaps?

### Final preparations

After arriving at Horsham we refuelled and also washed the aircraft. It had collected a lot of dirt en route. We also changed into our Awesome

Aviation corporate apparel. The next leg would see us arrive at Avalon. Time was of the essence as we had a slot for the arrival – especially as I had forgotten about the 30min time change when planning this leg! The relatively short leg to Avalon was flown over arable countryside and we made our slot at Avalon on Sunday 24 February.

Immediately upon our arrival, I was asked to show my Australian Health and Safety Certificate, allowing me to be on the airfield during the setting up. I didn't have one and so risked being removed from the site within one hour. I took their exam and thankfully, passed.

The next day I flew my validation flight and was accepted down to my waiver height of 100ft. I was ready to join the show for my appearances at the Trade Shows on 26 and 27 February, the Military Show on 28, along with public days on 1, 2 and 3 March. I had appeared at Avalon in 1999, in a Yak-52, but was really looking forward to this one. It is a cross between Farnborough, Fairford and Little Gransden.

I flew all my displays in front of crowds estimated at around 180,000. Finally, the End-of-Show Survivor Party was well attended – thankfully, everyone survived! The only minor incident was when one of the Breitling Team's Boeing Stearman aircraft developed rough running – flown by Martyn Carrington with Freya Paterson on the harness. They had an engine problem at the top of a formation barrel roll. Freya jumped down from the harness and strapped into the front cockpit as Martyn made a made a successful precautionary landing on the reserve runway.

### Extra success

Immediately after the show, Dieter Ebeling took his Awesome Extra 330LX to the Victorian State Aerobatic Championships at Tocumwal. He was placed first in each of three flights and won the Intermediate event with more than 83% – an excellent performance considering it was his first competition in many years.

I must end with a big thank you to all those people that made this trip happen: Dieter Ebeling, Joel Haski, Garry Criddle and Mike Jorgensen. Thank you gentlemen, it was an extremely memorable experience. ■



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