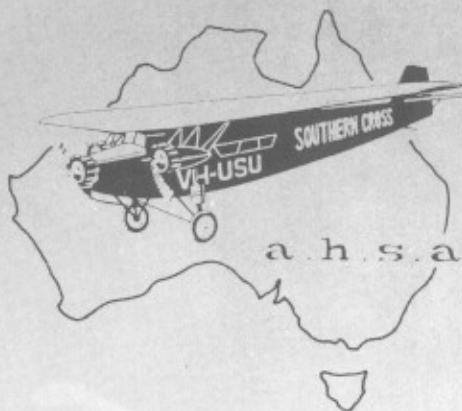


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STINSON'S RELIANT IN AUSTRALIA

by Geoff Goodall



The Stinson Reliant series of high performance touring aircraft were among the most popular business and charter aircraft in America during the 1930's. Developed from the Stinson Junior of 1930, the SR- Reliant series was built at Wayne, Michigan by Stinson Aircraft Corporation, and were considered to be the "Rolls Royce" of pre-war light planes.

The Reliants were big, luxurious aeroplanes of sturdy construction, offering performance and reliability. Contemporary types, such as the Waco cabin biplanes, could outfly the Reliant at high load, and the Beech 17 had superior climb and speed performance, but none could compare with the quality and luxury of furnishings, or the grace and space of the Reliant's cabin. As the Lycoming engine works were owned by Stinson's parent company Cord Corporation, the Reliants were powered by various models of Lycoming radials from 215 to 245 hp. Other popular radials, such as Wright Cyclone and Pratt & Whitney Wasp-Junior, were fitted to some Reliant versions to comply with customer requirements.

The Australian Government's embargo on the import of American aircraft was effectively broken in 1936 when Holyman's Airways Pty Ltd's first Douglas DC-2 arrived in Australia. The Melbourne firm Brown & Cuyrea Ltd established an Australian agency for a number of American aircraft and engine manufacturers including the Stinson Aircraft Corporation, and accepted orders early in 1936 for two Reliants from Guinea Airways Ltd and two for Queensland operators. These four SR-7B Reliants were the first new American light aircraft to be imported into Australia, priced at 3500 each.

In April, 1936 the first two Reliants were shipped to Brisbane and assembled at Archerfield

aerodrome. VH-UTW was test flown 1 May for P.H. Moody Air Taxis, whose proprietor "Skip" Moody was a popular local commercial aviation pioneer. VH-UXF was completed several days later for R.S. White of Eskdale, Qld, a wealthy grazier and pastoralist with varied business interests. He operated the aircraft for private and business purposes, flown by Captain T.S. Young.

Guinea Airways' two Reliants, VH-UGC & URC, were shipped out on the S.S. *City Of Brisbane* in late April, 1936 to Sydney where they were trans-shipped to the S.S. *Montoro* and left for Lae, New Guinea 5 May. They were assembled at Lae aerodrome and both were test flown on 1 June by company pilot C. Gurney before entering Guinea Airways service. These first four Reliants were all 4-seater SR-7Bs, powered by 245hp Lycoming R.680-6 radial engines. They were new aircraft, having been built between January and March, 1936 and each had only logged up to 5 hours test flying before being packed for shipping to Australia.

"Skip" Moody entered VH-UTW in the December 1936 Brisbane-Adelaide Air Race as Race Number 36, and he was soon favourite in the speed section. The field of 32 aircraft left Archerfield on 16 December and flying via Sydney and Melbourne reached Parafield aerodrome, Adelaide two days later. Moody recorded the second fastest total flying time of 9 hours 40 minutes, but was unplaced in the handicap results. Immediately after the race, the Reliant was sold to Airlines (WA) Ltd and ferried to Perth by the Managing Director Captain C.W. Snook and pilot R.H. Hickson. They arrived at Maylands aerodrome, Perth on 22 January, 1937 where the local press quoted Captain Snook's praise for the new aircraft: "The cabin furnishings are deeply upholstered, and entrance is provided by a wide door. There is as much room in the cabin as in a touring car."

Airlines named the Stinson *Meekatharra*, and it entered service on their regular flight from Perth to Wiluna and Kalgoorlie 25 January. It replaced their original Monospar, VH-UVJ *Miss Wiluna*, which had crashed the previous month. The Reliant made a forced landing at Cue on 18 April, and received minor damage from a 'willy willy' while parked on the ground at Kalgoorlie on 19 October, 1937. It was popular with passengers on the Goldfields service, and also regularly flew Airlines' new route to Rottnest Island. VH-UTW continued in full airline service until March, 1942 when it was sent to Broome to assist in the evacuation after the first Japanese air raids on the North-West of W.A. On 20 March, while flying survivors of the bombed ship *Koolama* from Drysdale Mission to Broome, the Stinson was caught on the ground at Broome by the second Japanese air attack on that town. An hour after a morning reconnaissance aircraft passed over Broome, a medium force of bombers and fighters attacked the town, concentrating on the aerodrome. Over fifty bombs were dropped, killing one civilian and destroying the Stinson. MMA Lockheed 10A Electras, VH-ABV & ABW, and ANA DC-2, VH-USY, which were also taking part in the *Koolama* evacuation had all departed Broome just prior to the air raid. Airlines (WA) Ltd later assessed the Reliant's value at £1300 for compensation from the War Damage Commission.

The other Queensland Reliant, VH-UXF, continued on private flying for R.S. ("Scamp") White taking him between his farm "Eskdale" at Esk and his other pastoral holdings. On 28 June, 1939 the Reliant, a Miles Hawk Major (VH-UGQ), and a Taylor Cub (VH-UXW) were destroyed by fire inside the Qantas Empire Airways hangar at Archerfield. White immediately purchased D.H.85 Leopard Moth VH-UUE to replace the Stinson.



OPPOSITE PAGE

TOP: Vacuum Oil's Reliant, VH-UXL, flying over Melbourne in 1937. (via J.S. Smith).

BOTTOM: Airlines (WA) Ltd's Reliant, VH-UTW, at Maylands aerodrome, Perth, shortly after delivery on 22 Jan 1937. Pilot, R.H. Hickson, on left, Managing Director, Captain C.W. Snook on right. (via G. Goodall).

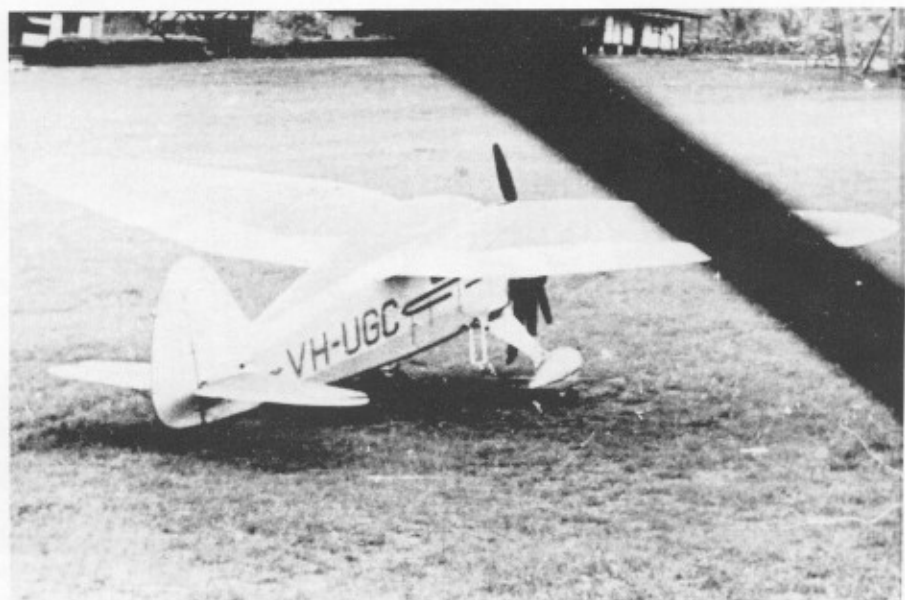
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TOP: R.S. White's VH-UXF at its home on

'Eskdale' near Esk, Queensland, in June 1936. (via G. Goodall).

CENTRE: VH-UTW, when owned by P.H. Moody, carrying the race number 46 for the 1936 Brisbane-Adelaide Air Race. (Hopton Collection).

BOTTOM: The same aircraft in an idyllic picnic setting. Note the Queensland Air Taxis motif on the tail. (Holyman Collection via Hopton).



GUINEA AIRWAYS RELIANTS

Meanwhile Guinea Airways Ltd's original pair of SR-7B Reliants were giving good service on the New Guinea goldfields where they replaced the company's aging D.H.61 Giant Moths VH-UQJ & UTL. The Reliant VH-UGC suffered minor damage when its port undercarriage leg collapsed on landing at Surprise Creek on 29 April, 1937 while a freight flight, however pilot G.W. Cannon was not hurt. The aircraft was quickly returned to service, having logged 510 hours flying during its first year's operation. Sister, VH-URC, at this time had logged an even more impressive total flying time of 669 hours, but was written off shortly afterwards on 27 August, 1937 when it crashed at Wau on a freight flight. The Stinson took off at Wau in heavy fog at 7.15 that morning and pilot W.J. Robins attempted to follow a preceeding Mandated Airlines aircraft up through a break in the fog above the strip but could not reach the spot due to his heavy load. He turned left to avoid the fog and was unable to outclimb rising terrain and struck a native wooden house at full power, killing the occupant and injuring the pilot: the Reliant was damaged beyond repair and the house destroyed.

As a replacement, Guinea Airways purchased a new SR-9FM Reliant, VH-ABJ, early the following year. The SR-9 series was an improved 5-seater with rounded front windscreen, and the SR-9FM model had Edo floats interchangeable with standard wheeled landing gear, and was powered by a 400hp Pratt & Whitney Wasp-Junior engine. The new aircraft was shipped direct to Lae where assembly was completed at Lae aerodrome on 22 February, 1938 and the float plane was testflown on Huon Gulf from the edge of the airfield. It was specially fitted out for New Guinea work with an extended cabin 12 feet long, a hatch built into the cabin roof to aid loading of bulky cargo items, and extra fuel tanks.

The floatplane Reliant, VH-ABJ, saw extensive use throughout Papua under contract to oil search companies. It went into immediate service on charter to Papuan Oil Development Co. Ltd, flown by Guinea Airways pilots Ken Garden and Aubrey Koch. The aircraft was perfectly suited for support duties for oil search ground parties, landing on rivers in inaccessible areas far from the nearest airstrips. Its performance was only slightly reduced by the big floats, having a payload of 1,000 lb and a range of 450 miles. VH-ABJ also flew several thousand hours of charter to rival oil search firms Island Exploration Co. and Australasian Petroleum Co. Pty Ltd.

On 7 May, 1938 an Island Exploration field party on the Strickland River was attacked with arrows by native nomads and one man was hit in the arm. The party contacted Port Moresby by radio and VH-ABJ flew to Daru to pick up a detachment of armed police, a company representative, and the resident Magistrate. They then flew to the camp site where the situation was soon brought under control. A similar emergency flight took place on 22 July that year when Ken Garden left Port Moresby for Kerema carrying four armed native policemen with ammunition to assist a Patrol Officer on the Tauri River who had reportedly been attacked by wild Kukukuku natives. After landing at Yule Island to pick up the Magistrate and two Patrol Officers, they continued to the camp site and found the man unhurt.

VH-ABJ was out of service for a period in June, 1939 when the float chassis was badly cracked and new parts were sent out from the USA. The aircraft also suffered some airframe corrosion from sea water for most of its time in New Guinea. It completed a long-term contract to the Australasian Petroleum Co. on 1 October, 1940 and in the



following January had a major CofA renewal overhaul at Lae to continue in Guinea Airways service.

Guinea Airways' landplane Reliant, VH-UGC, had logged a remarkable 3,265 hours by September, 1940 after flying 1000 hours in the previous 12 months. The aircraft was now retired at Lae, only flying occasional charters. The imminent Japanese invasion of New Guinea caused Guinea Airways to hurriedly renew the Reliant's CofA at Salamaua on 7 January, 1942 and it assisted in the frantic evacuation of the Highlands for the next weeks. Both Guinea Airways' Reliants were among the aircraft destroyed during the first

OPPOSITE PAGE

TOP: One of Guinea Airways first two Reliants, VH-UGC, at Lae in New Guinea circa 1937. (via G. Goodall).

CENTRE: Guinea Airways other Reliant, VH-URC, also at Lae, shortly after assembly in June 1936. (via G. Goodall).

BOTTOM: The same aircraft after its crash at Wau on 27 August 1937. (G.W. Cannon

THIS PAGE

ABOVE: VH-UGC, seen here at Wau, had logged some 3,265 hours in four years before being retired at Lae. (via Hopton Collection).

BELOW: The floatplane Reliant, VH-ABJ, was purchased when VH-URC was written off and saw considerable service in support of various oil search companies. (G.W. Cannon via Hopton Collection).





LEFT: VH-UXL, when operated by the Vacuum Oil Co., on a visit to Maylands aerodrome Perth in 1936. (via G. Goodall).

BELOW: Two shots of VH-UXL at Bankstown circa 1940, when privately owned by William Smith. (via F.F. Smith and Hopton Collection).



Japanese air attacks along the north coast on 21 January, 1942. On that morning a formation of 70 enemy bombers and fighters flew over Madang then divided into 3 groups to attack Lae, Bulolo and Salamaua. At Lae the enemy aircraft spent 40 minutes attacking the town and airfield, destroying civil airline hangars and buildings and six aircraft on the ground. At Salamaua bombing from 8000 feet was followed by low level strafing by 50 Japanese aircraft, destroying a total of 12 civil aircraft and a RAAF Hudson as well as all airfield buildings. Other enemy units attacked Madang, Wau and Kavieng that same day. The Stinson Reliants, VH-UGC & -ABJ, were destroyed during these raids, but the location at which each was attacked is not recorded, due to the confusion of the period.

VACUUM OIL'S RELIANT

The sole remaining Stinson Reliant in Australia today, was originally imported by Vacuum Oil Co Pty Ltd in late 1936, as probably our first true company executive aircraft. Vacuum ordered a new SR-8B model, which had been released earlier that year as a development of the SR-7B with the same Lycoming engine but increased seating for 4 passengers in a slightly shorter fuselage. Vacuum's SR-8B, VH-UXL was first flown at the Stinson factory in Michigan on 14 August, 1936 and after 4 hours of test flying was dismantled and packed for shipping to Australia. The Reliant was unloaded from S.S. *Ardenvohr* at the Melbourne docks on 5 October and taken to Essendon aerodrome for assembly, where it was test flown on 13 October by Vacuum Oil's company pilot F.W. Haig and an Australian CoFA issued the same day. The Stinson was based at Essendon but flew throughout the country on Vacuum business over the next three years.

Vacuum sold VH-UXL in September, 1939 to William J. Smith of Australian Glass Manufacturing Co. Pty Ltd, Sydney for £1400. It continued as a private business aircraft based at Mascot until February, 1941 when the war situation caused the RAAF to take over the Reliant for light transport work. Impressment Requisition No. 8194 was issued for the aircraft and it was taken on RAAF charge as A38-1 at No.2 Communications Flight, Mascot on 24 February, 1941. Smith was later paid £1750 compensation for the Stinson which had been impressed in good condition with a total airframe time of 936 hours.

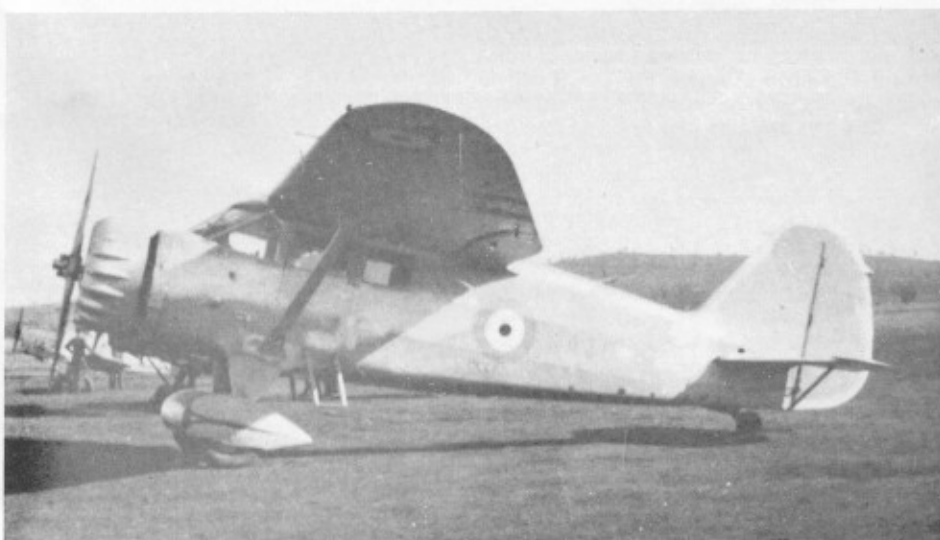


After overhaul by Australian National Airways at Mascot, the RAAF's sole Stinson Reliant entered service with 2 Communications Flight in April, 1941. 2CF had been formed the previous December with a variety of mainly impressed light aircraft such as the Dragon, Dragonfly, Tiger Moth, Moth Minor, Miles Hawk and Beech 17 types to provide light communications duties in southern Australia. The Reliant A38-1 arrived at Temora, NSW on 9 July, 1941 to take up temporary residence there and 2CF's main base was moved from Mascot to Wagga, NSW in May, 1942. In December that year the Reliant was flown to Essendon for major servicing by Ansett Airways Ltd. The Lycoming engine was found to require complete overhaul, and lack of spare parts caused the RAAF to make enquiries to DCA regarding the fitting of a 400hp Wasp Junior instead, but this was not proceeded with and after 6 months delay a replacement Lycoming was eventually obtained and installed. The overhaul was completed at Ansett's in June, 1943 and the Stinson was received back with 2CF at Wagga on 25 June. The unit was renamed No.2 Communications Unit that October and in February, 1944, 2CU advised DCA that some of its older impressed aircraft were now retired and available for disposal back to civil operators.

The Reliant was inspected at Wagga by a DCA airworthiness surveyor on 29 February. His report showed that the aircraft had flown 608 hours while with the RAAF and was now held in fair condition, but without an engine. Lack of spares for the Lycoming radial had plagued the aircraft during its RAAF career, and on 2 March the Reliant was issued to DCA to arrange for its civil disposal and on 2 March the Reliant was issued to DCA to arrange for its civil disposal as an airframe only, without power plant. After 2CU was disbanded in July, 1944 A38-1 was left parked in the open at Wagga RAAF Station until was finally trucked to Essendon on 6 January the following year. Its general condition had now deteriorated and as no immediate buyer could be found, it was held dismantled at Essendon by DCA for the next few years.

By January, 1947, A38-1 had been purchased by Air Operations Pty Ltd at Essendon. A lengthy rebuild commenced and a new Lycoming R-680-B5 engine was fitted, changing the model designation to SR-8C Reliant. The job was finally completed in May, 1948 and the aircraft was brought back on to the Civil Register as VH-UXL and its CofA renewed on 27 May, 1948. Air Operations had originally intended to use the Stinson for charter flying, but instead offered it back to DCA for £4900. After the Department politely declined the offer, Air Operations advertised the aircraft for sale and the following year sold it to Arthur Hardidge of Sorrento, Vic who used it for his private flying for the next 8 years, usually based at Moorabbin.

In June, 1957 the Reliant was purchased by K.A. Findlay of Findlay's Broadcasting Service, Launceston, Tas and registered VH-KAF. It continued as a private aircraft, based at Launceston Airport alongside Findlay's smaller Stinson L-5 Sentinel, VH-BFR, for the next four years. In May, 1961 the Reliant was traded to Rex Aviation Ltd, Sydney, on a new Cessna 175B, VH-KAF. Rex immediately sold the Reliant to D.B. Mott of Newcastle, NSW and it was registered VH-CWM and took up residence at Rutherford aerodrome, West Maitland, NSW. Don Mott took the brightly painted red, white, and black Stinson on an around-Australia holiday flight in December, 1963, spending Christmas Day in Perth. The following March he entered VH-CWM in the Ansett Air Race from Brisbane to Adelaide, and the big Reliant was Race Number 71, towering over the rest of the field. The 146 competing air-



TOP: VH-UXL shortly after impressment as A38-1 in February 1941. The colour scheme has been little altered from that shown on the previous page. (via P.T. Malone).

CENTRE: A38-1 at Wagga circa 1943. It has now been doped silver overall, but the port

wheel spat appears to retain its original colours. (via F.F. Smith).

BOTTOM: After its wartime use A38-1 was finally registered as VH-UXL again in May 1948 after an extensive overhaul. It is shown here circa 1950. (Hopton Collection).

craft departed Archerfield on 29 March, 1964 and arrived Parafield on 1 April, following an almost identical route to the 1936 Brisbane-Adelaide Race. Just like Moody's VH-UTW in that previous race, Mott was unplaced in the final results, however his Reliant was one of the star attractions of the vintage section of the race.

VH-CWM remained based at West Maitland until May, 1967 when it arrived at Moorabbin en route to Tasmania for Gavin Youl of Symonds Plains, Tas. Youl is an active Tasmanian flier who currently operates a Hughes 269, VH-IHK, for charter work, and had a Piper Comanche 260, VH-DUJ, for his private use. He sold the Comanche to Don Mott and it was reregistered to an appropriate VH-MOT. Youl took the Stinson Reliant as a trade-in, and kept it at Launceston Airport as his private aircraft.

The next big event in VH-CWM's life came in March, 1970 when it was purchased by Perth real estate entrepreneur Des O'Sullivan for his proposed flying air museum to be established in Perth. A Tiger Moth, VH-FAS, had been ferried to Perth from NSW in February, as the first aircraft of the collection, and options were held on several other vintage aircraft around the country. O'Sullivan was no stranger to aviation, having formed Millard O'Sullivan Aviation Pty Ltd, Perth in 1962, as Piper agents and operating air charter and a flying school until taken over by Civil Flying Services Pty Ltd in October, 1965. In charge of the air museum project was Ron Tutt, who was O'Sullivan's company pilot for his Aero Commander VH-ELH.

Tutt departed Launceston on 10 March in the veteran Stinson, and the first leg of the long ferry flight to Western Australia proved quite eventful. While flying across Bass Strait later that day, the fabric on the cabin roof began to split and tear back in the airstream. Tutt reached Moorabbin safely however, and the fabric was replaced in Schutt Aircraft's hangar before the flight continued on 13 March. Refuelling at Stawell, Whyalla, Ceduna, Forrest, Kalgoorlie and Cunderdin, the Reliant arrived at Perth's Jandakot Airport on 15 March.

The Stinson had logged a total airframe time of 2100 hours since built, and now required a major rebuild to restore it to immaculate condition for the flying museum. The aircraft entered the Royal Aero Club of WA hangar at Jandakot at the end of March and was dismantled for overhaul. Shortage of spare parts caused progress to be slow, and the rebuild was to continue for the next 4 years. The Tiger Moth was found to be in poor condition, and after giving an aerobatic display at the Aviat 70 Airshow at Jandakot on 27 September, 1970 it was grounded and dismantled next to the Stinson in the hangar. The time and cost involved in both these rebuilds effectively ended the flying museum concept, and options on other aircraft were dropped. The work on the Reliant and Tiger Moth was now given low priority and proceeded slowly in the back of the Aero Club hangar.

By early 1974, VH-CWM was nearly complete again, painted all-over white. Difficulty in obtaining spares, particularly brake components, held up work again. However, the great day finally came on 17 October, 1974 when Ron Tutt took the white Stinson into the air at Jandakot for its first test flight. The following month the veteran made her WA public debut on 10 November at the Beverley Air Show, 70 miles east of Perth. The Reliant was given pride of place in the vintage fly-past, and the rumbling of her Lycoming engine as Tutt flew her low past the crowd will long be remembered by those present.

The veteran Reliant was now based at Jandakot, flying only rarely. It was advertised for sale and for some time it was thought that it may be sold to



THIS PAGE:

TOP: VH-CWM at Bankstown when owned by D.B. Mott of Carrington, N.S.W. (J. Hopton).

BOTTOM: After purchase by F.D. O'Sullivan VH-CWM was flown to Western Australia and is seen here at Jandakot Airport, Perth, shortly after arrival in March 1970. (G. Goodall).

OPPOSITE PAGE

TOP: In 1964 Don Mott flew VH-CWM in the Ansett Air Race from Brisbane to Adelaide. The big Stinson is seen here at Moorabbin on 29 March. (J. Hopton).

CENTRE AND BOTTOM: VH-CWM's public debut at the Beverley Air Show in November 1974, after a four year rebuild at Jandakot. (G. Goodall).

USA, however in late 1976 it was purchased by respected vintage aircraft collector Joe Drage of Wodonga, Vic. VH-CWM's last WA outing was a visit to the Northam Air Show 17 October, 1976 where it flew several farewell circuits. Ron Tutt departed Jandakot in the Stinson on 29 October for the ferry flight to Victoria, and handed the aircraft over to Joe Drage at Wodonga on 2 November, 1976.

Australia's sole surviving Stinson Reliant is now displayed at Drage's Historic Aircraft Museum at Wodonga, where it still takes to the air on flying days.

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15. Unit History of 2 CU. Air Historical Branch, Department of Defence, Canberra.

Australian Reliants

SR-7B VH-UXF

- C/n 9651 20. 1.36 Manufactured Wayne, Michigan
24. 2.36 US CofA issued: R.S. White, Eskdale, Qld.
5. 5.36 VH-UXF R.S. White, Eskdale, Qld
28. 6.39 Burnt in hangar fire, Archerfield, Qld.

SR-7B VH-UTW

- C/n 9665 24. 2.36 Manufactured Wayne, Michigan
4. 5.36 VH-UTW P.H. Moody, Brisbane, Qld.
22. 3.37 Airlines (WA) Ltd, Perth
20. 3.42 DEA Broome, WA

SR-7B VH-UGC

- C/n 9668 3.36 Manufactured Wayne, Michigan
1. 6.36 VH-UGC Guinea Airways Ltd, Lae, NG.
21. 1.42 DEA (New Guinea)
11. 3.42 Struck off Register

SR-7B VH-URC

- C/n 9669 3.36 Manufactured Wayne, Michigan
8. 6.36 VH-URC Guinea Airways Ltd, Lae, NG.
27. 8.37 Crashed Wau, NG

SR-8B VH-UXL/KAF/CWM

- C/n 9766 8.36 Manufactured Wayne, Michigan
14. 8.36 First flight
13.10.36 VH-UXL Vacuum Oil Co Pty Ltd., Melbourne, Vic.
14. 9.39 W.J. Smith & A.E. Cooper, Sydney, NSW
24. 2.41 Impressed by RAAF as A38-1
4. 5.45 Struck off RAAF charge
27. 5.48 VH-UXL (SR-8C) Air Operations Pty Ltd, Melbourne
14.11.49 A.R. Hardidge, Sorrento, Vic. Later Rosebud, Vic.
1. 6.57 K.A. Findlay, Launceston, Tas.
10.57 Reregistered VH-KAF
4.12.59 Findlay's Broadcasting Service, Launceston, Tas.
12. 5.61 Reregistered VH-CWM
20. 5.61 Rex Aviation Pty Ltd., Sydney, NSW
12.12.61 D.B. Mott, Carrington, NSW
5.67 G.B. Youl, Symonds Plains, Tas
1. 8.68 Official Register date to Youl
10. 3.70 F.D. O'Sullivan, Perth, WA
6. 3.74 O'Sullivan's General Agency Co. Pty Ltd, Perth
3.12.76 J.G. Drage, Wodonga, Vic Currently Registered

SR-9FM VH-ABJ

- C/n 5257 11.37 Manufactured Wayne, Michigan
30.11.37 First flight
25. 2.38 VH-ABJ Guinea Airways Ltd, Lae, NG
21. 1.42 DEA (New Guinea)
11. 3.42 Struck off Register

Note: DEA: Destroyed by Enemy Action



Specifications

SPECIFICATIONS	Span	Length	Cruise Speed	All Up Weight
SR-7B Reliant 4 seater Lycoming R-680-B6 245hp	41'10"	28'0"	140 mph	3500 lb
SR-8B Reliant 5 seater Lycoming R-680-B6 245hp	41'10 1/4"	27'5 1/2"	140 mph	3750 lb
SR-9FM Reliant 5 seater P&W Wasp Junior SB 400hp	41'10"	27'11"	143 mph*	3700 lb*
				(*without floats)