

New home for nation's first Cessna



The C-34, the first Cessna to fly in Australia and one of only two in the world, stands beside one of its hi-tech successors, the Citation X

The new buyer says he will preserve 'the history' and keep the plane flying

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IT was damaged in several forced landings, pressed into service by the RAAF and has had a string of owners in five states.

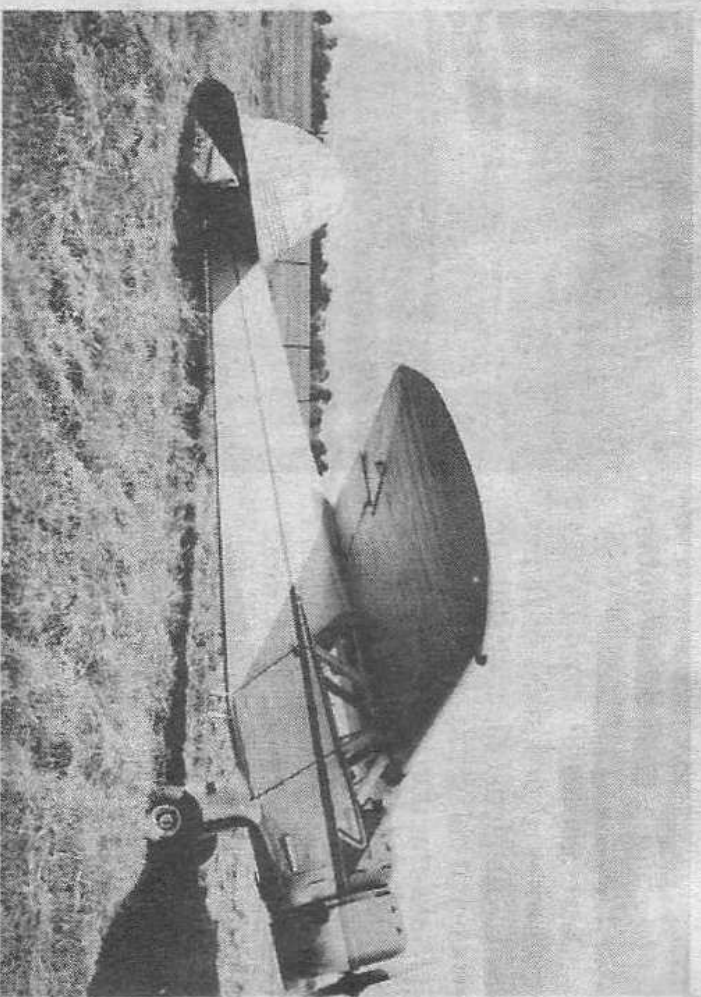
But the first Cessna to fly in Australia — and one of only two C-34s in the world — has made it through three-quarters of a century to find a new home in Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

Aeromil Pacific boss and Cessna dealer Steve Padgett acquired the rare aircraft, VH-UYG, from former Ansett captain Greg Cox last December.

"In the end it was a bit hard for him to hang on to, for all sorts of reasons," Mr Padgett said this week. "I was very keen to get hold of it to preserve the history as the first Cessna in Australia.

"And we're going to really look after it and probably put it in showroom-type environment on the Sunshine Coast Airport, but also keep it flying."

The aircraft, part of what would later become known as the Air-master series, was the second last of 42 C-34s to be built in 1935-36. Described by Cessna historian



The C-34 saved the Cessna Aircraft Co from closure in the 1930s

Edward H. Phillips as "the right airplane at the right time", the affordable C-34 saved the Cessna Aircraft Company after it had been forced by the Great Depression to close its doors in the early 1930s.

It was designed by a young aeronautical engineer who was also the nephew of Clyde Cessna, Dwane Wallace.

Wallace had been working with Walter Beech, of Beech Aircraft fame, when he began designing a new aircraft and teamed with his brother Dwight to wrest control of his uncle's company.

Work quickly began on the C-34, a plane featuring a full cantilevered wing, a four-seat

cabin and powered by a Warner Super Scarab radial engine.

Costing \$US4985 and with a cruise speed of 145mph (235km/h), the plane won the Detroit News Trophy Race for overall efficiency and the first production aircraft was delivered to a customer in November 1935.

The Australian plane came off the production in December 1936 and was shipped to Australia in January 1938 to be registered with Airflight Ltd, at Mascot, in July.

It would suffer a series of forced and crash landings over the next two years before being pressed into service as a communications aircraft by the RAAF.

A forced landing due to a par-

tial engine failure and difficulties servicing the radial engine would see the RAAF offer it to civilian buyers and it was sold for £50 to the president of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (WA Section), Harold Dicks.

Dicks used the aircraft to fly from the Maylands Aerodrome to do medical work in rural Western Australia.

The aircraft would be sold again in 1947 and go through a series of owners based in Queensland, NSW, Victoria and South Australia. It was taken off the register in 1973 and transferred to Albury, NSW, in 1977 to be dismantled and stored.

In 1991, new owner Kim Ryan picked it up from Albury on a purpose-built trailer and took it back to Cairns. Mr Ryan was lucky enough to find 74-year-old retired aircraft engineer John Lucas, whose woodworking skills allowed the wing structure to be reconditioned.

Because the Super Scarab was missing, the aircraft was initial fitted with a W670 Continental engine when it again took to the skies in 1993.

It was subsequently replaced by a Super Scarab acquired in Sydney and aircraft was re-registered that year.

The aircraft was bought by Mr Cox in 2000 and flown privately until Mr Padgett acquired it last year.