

PRETORIA BOYS HIGH AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY VISIT TO WONDERBOOM AIRPORT

By John Illsley

Being the closest airport to the school and the one serving the city of Pretoria, the Society tends to visit this once or twice a year. Sadly, the AHRLAC factory couldn't be on the itinerary this year due to its (hopefully temporary) closure. However, there is plenty of other activity and innovation going on at Wonderboom that was woven into an afternoon excursion.

Our visit started at the SAPS Air Wing hangar where the host was a Comair Captain who also flies part time for this unit. On arrival at the hangar, the boys realised that they might have let themselves in for more than they imagined. They were immediately formed into a drill squad by the booming voice of Kalahari Bierman (below) who, once he was satisfied with the orderly line up of his recruits, proceeded to do an initial briefing on the work of the Police Air Wing. What followed was a rather more informal, although no less informative tour of the hangar with an outline of the aircraft types, roles and capabilities. The ability to move SAPS members or units into any part of the country was impressive.





We next walked the short distance to a geophysical survey company, Xcalibur, to be met by a good friend of the Society, David Toma (bottom, right). David is a Council member of the Aeronautical Society of South Africa. He had agreed to talk to us about the aircraft operated by this company because the company was too busy to spare one of its own personnel. Examples of the Air Tractor 502 and 504 were to be seen and David outlined how these crop sprayers have been adapted to the role of survey aircraft with sensors mounted on the wing tips. We were also shown in the distance a DC3 used in the same role and even more heavily adapted, with sensors on the wings, nose and tail.



David then took us to the Flitecare hangar where we were shown the types operated as trainers and charter, including the Sling and Kodiak. The conversion programme which sees Cessna 402 aircraft converted to single turbo prop aircraft is always interesting in how older aircraft can be given a new lease of life with certain added advantages in performance.



”

All in all, a worthwhile afternoon in terms of showing Society members a cross section of aircraft types and career opportunities in the aviation industry.



However, the highlight was probably the chance to sit in the Vampire trainer cockpit, an immaculate example previously flown by the Swiss Air Force.

The last company visited was Sport Plane Builders, where the owner, Pierre Van der Walt showed us a diverse range of aircraft being worked on by his team. Most of these are of composite construction and the new six seat turbo prop design derived in part from the Raven is a product of his company and was close to its first test flights. At the other end of the spectrum was a Bakeng Deuce homebuilt which is very much in the “rag and tube” category and an interesting contrast to the sleek composites.

The day ended with the traditional visit to the control tower at dusk. Although the circuit was very quiet by then, the boys could still get a good idea of the workings of an airport control tower and the job of ATC.

All in all, a worthwhile afternoon in terms of showing Society members a cross section of aircraft types and career opportunities in the aviation industry.

**The AeSSA has permission to publish the photos of the learners.*