



Flying the CYGNET

As one of the longest river systems in the world, the River Murray meanders from its source in the Australian Alps through three states before eventually flowing into the Southern Ocean just near the town of Goolwa in South Australia. That is a total river length of 2520 kilometres!

Over the Coorong

by Larry Jones

Before flowing into the ocean, the river opens into Lake Alexandrina, Lake Albert and the Coorong. Hindmarsh Island is situated near the river mouth and is reputed to be the largest island in the world with saltwater on one side and freshwater on the other.

Needless to say, it is a magnificent area teeming with wildlife and home to many species of fish, turtles and birds, including migratory ones, some of which breed in northern Asia and Alaska. On the shores of these lakes we see lizards, snakes, beetles, dragonflies, moths and butterflies.

Milang is a small town on the edge of Lake Alexandrina, and just five nautical miles (Nm) inland, we find the Strathalbyn airfield. It is from here that I have been flying and teaching people to fly microlight aircraft for the past 30 years.

I've spent many hundreds of hours flying around this area and never tire of it. It is such a diverse area and within just a five Nm radius of the airfield, I find myself flying over vineyards, wineries, potatoes, turf farms, dairies, horses, olives, almonds, crops and grazing land – even a zinc mine. As we move through the seasons, the ever-changing colours are at times breathtaking.



Cygnet 2, Fort Walton Beach, Florida

Over the Coorong

The photo titled 'Over the Coorong' is taken from one of our training aircraft (Airborne XT Outback) and shows the calm waters and sand hills of the Coorong, with the Southern Ocean on the other side. Following the Coorong down to Meningie (30Nm) or further on to Kingston (100Nm) can offer a great day's flying, with airfields at both locations, fuel stations and pubs for a counter lunch before heading home – wonderful.

Of course, as much as I've enjoyed the years of flying over and around these lakes, I've always harboured a desire to land and take off from the lakes as well – just to add yet another dimension to my flying.

Years of looking for an amphibian microlight that was simple, strong, powerful, low maintenance and truly capable of operating with ease from both land or water eventually led me to the Cygnet.

The Cygnet 2

The Cygnet has been around for many years. Originally designed and manufactured by JP Krucker in Canada, it was flown extensively from freshwater lakes. Michael Percy took the Cygnet and changed some of the materials and coatings used to make it more suitable for saltwater operations.

Operating from Fort Walton Beach, Florida, Michael proved the Cygnet to be seaworthy, took over the manufacture, produced the Cygnet 2 and submitted a package to the FAA for approval as a Light Sport Aircraft.

Further refinement now sees the Cygnet 3 on the market and approved as either an E-LSA or an S-LSA (Light Sport Aircraft).

The Cygnet is available with the Rotax 582, 912 or 912s and uses the North Wing, Mustang 3 range of wings. The engine of choice is the Rotax 912s and with its 100hp driving a Warp Drive propeller, it is smooth, quiet and powerful.

The wing of choice is the Mustang 3 19, a single-surface strutted wing with an area of 19m², trimming out at about 40kt. The floats are made of folded and welded aluminum, with an aggressive step that allows the float to get up on the plain quickly, making water take-offs an easy affair.

All three wheels are fitted with Tundra tyres and are connected to a simple lever that allows the undercarriage to be locked up for water operations or down for land-based operations. The seats are very comfortable and afford pilot and passenger room to move, a great view and a dry ride.

Cygnet 3, Lake Alexandrina

As I taxi out to the runway, at first it seems strange to have these big floats accompanying me, however, it steers like a traditional trike, and the Tundra tyres and rear wheel suspension give a pleasant ride as I enter and back-track runway 14. Easing the throttle, the Cygnet moves forward, full throttle, bar out and I am soon off the ground and climbing. Yes, it is a big, heavy trike, but the large single-surface wing lifts it with ease. Handling is good, bar in, out, left, right – all works as it should.

Leaving the circuit and continuing on climb, I reach to the left, release the locking mechanism, pull the lever down and it locks with a click, a quick visual check confirms the wheels are up.

Once out over the lake, a small wind shadow visible along the shoreline, the odd white cap and light wind lines confirm a north-westerly of about 10kt. I turn and line up into the wind, lower the nose and back off the throttle. As I approach the water, I start a gentle flare and the back of the floats touch the water as I continue to hold off. The engine is on idle and I am squeezing the last of the energy out of the wing as the floats skim along the surface of the lake. Friction is winning and the floats sink lower into the water and eventually we



Cygnet 3, Lake Alexandrina, South Australia



Larry and Chris flying the Cygnet over Lake Alexandrina



come to a stop. I kill the engine and sit bobbing up and down in the middle of the lake, it is quiet and peaceful, I am grinning from ear to ear. What a blast! I think I'll do that again.

Contact Larry for further information about the Cygnet amphibian, flying lessons or to book a trial flight. Larry Jones 0408 815 094 or <larry@airports.com.au>.

Larry and Stew commencing a take-off on the lake