

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Otago Aero Club Announces Centennial Celebrations at Taieri Aerodrome

Otago Aero Club, New Zealand's first established aero club, will mark its 100-year anniversary in February 2027 with a spectacular three-day aviation celebration at Taieri Aerodrome, Mosgiel.

Founded on 21st January 1927, the club has trained more than a thousand pilots over the past century, with many going on to distinguished careers in commercial airlines and the military. Taieri Aerodrome itself holds a proud place in New Zealand's aviation history, having hosted Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and the *Southern Cross* after his pioneering Trans-Tasman flight in March 1933 and Jean Batten in July 1934, after her solo flight from England to Australia. Taieri served as an RNZAF Station from 1939-1944 as the No. 1 Elementary Flying Training School and through to 1959 as a Territorial Air Force base in the post war years.

The centennial celebrations will be held on the 5th, 6th and 7th of February 2027 (Waitangi Weekend) and will feature:

- **Friday:** the arrival of vintage, homebuilt, classic, and military aircraft followed by Registration and Meet and Greet of club members and visitors.
- **Saturday:** a public open day with aircraft and classic car displays, fashion shows, and rare opportunities for the public to fly in historic aircraft, followed by a Centennial Gala Dinner with a guest.
- **Sunday:** a fly-in to and lunch at South Otago Aero Club in Balclutha, a long standing affiliate club since March 1931.

As part of the centennial celebrations, Otago Aero Club is launching a national fundraising campaign to reacquire a historically significant aircraft: Cessna 150 ZK-CGI. In 1970, the aircraft was stolen from Taieri and deliberately ditched in Lake Duncan, Fiordland. The student pilot evaded capture for five weeks by hiding in the bush before eventually fleeing to Australia. ZK-CGI was later recovered from the lakebed, restored to flying condition, and is now on display at the Classic Flyers Aviation Museum in Tauranga. The Club's goal is to bring this iconic aircraft home to Taieri and use it to offer flying scholarships—giving new pilots the chance to train in a plane with a remarkable backstory.

"Reaching 100 years is a milestone not just for Otago Aero Club, but for aviation in New Zealand," said **Mike Beattie, Club Vice President**. "We're excited to welcome aviators and the wider community to Taieri Aerodrome to celebrate our proud history and inspire the next generation of pilots. A key highlight will be the recognition of a group of scholarship recipients who, by the time of the Gala Dinner, will have reached solo flight stage in a historic aircraft. We'll also be announcing additional scholarships to support advanced flight training — an incredible

opportunity to launch aviation careers and continue the club's legacy of flight training excellence."

The weekend will honour the club's legacy while showcasing the vibrancy of New Zealand's aviation community today.

For more information:

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About Otago Aero Club

Founded in 1927, Otago Aero Club is New Zealand's first aero club and has been based at Taieri Aerodrome since its inception. In addition to flight training and regular gatherings, the club fosters a strong aviation community through flying events, competitions and outreach to inspire future generations of pilots.