

# A Pioneering Spirit

Lateral thinking and a unique set of problems has meant a return to aviation for one Wairarapa farmer, as **Clive Wilkinson** found out.

**W**hen John McGuinness learned to fly in the mid seventies with Waikato Flying School under the careful guidance of the CFI Jack Bindon, it wasn't long before marriage, raising three sons and running a farm at Te Awamutu put paid to any dreams of flying as a hobby.

Or so he thought!

In 1980 John and Mary McGuinness purchased the 5,000-acre Flat Point Station, situated 60 kms from Masterton on Wairarapa's rugged coastline. Now 7,000 acres, in farming terms Flat Point Station would be described as low-intensive in regards to output, with 6,000 ewes and 1,000 head of cattle, plus breeding bulls, as well as cereal crops, seed peas and a small vineyard. There's nothing too outstanding about that — until one considers John's amazing imagination and lateral thinking, which have the ability to turn the normal into something quite unusual.

First on the agenda was the construction of a nine-hole golf course on the flat coastal area near the homestead. This was followed by a 39-section development of up-market residences positioned near the golf course and giving an unrestricted view of the expansive Pacific Ocean.

One of their three sons then decided he wanted to learn to fly, but the nearest school was some 60 kilometres away at Masterton — something of a trek by car. Not unexpectedly, John had a rather out-of-the-ordinary solution to this problem: build an airstrip, buy an aircraft, renew his licence and fly his son to Masterton.

The strip, comprising a grass 500-metre runway orientated to 17/35 and a smaller cross vector strip, was built five years ago by John. The main vector has a mean height of 15 feet above sea level and slopes 20 feet from one end to the other.

The landing strip is looked after with the same loving care as his adjacent golf course and is rolled and cut almost to the same standard as the greens (so there is no excuse for a bumpy landing!). Lucerne covers the remainder of the airfield and is cut, on average, five times per year (which also gives an excellent feed bonus for the station stock).

John has recently applied for his strip to be included in the aerodrome section of the NZAIP, and with all the work and effort that has been put in, it is no wonder the Flat Point strip is becoming quite popular as a weekend drop-in point for local fliers.

The decision on what type of aircraft to buy and

where to learn to fly came next. The Italian-designed two-seat Alpi Pioneer 200, although a microlight, has all the hallmarks of an Italian thoroughbred racing car — sleek and fast, but with a take-off and landing distance of only 100 metres, perfect for John's requirements.

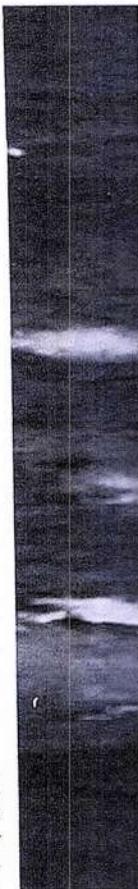
Flying lessons began in Whangarei with Bert Gregory of the Northern Microlight Club, who as an ATI with over 20,000 hours, including about 10,000 on helicopters and considerable ag work experience, was the ideal instructor. With a microlight certificate successfully achieved, and with the NZ agency for Alpi Aviation and several Alpi demonstration aircraft situated at Whangarei Airfield, John then had ample time to evaluate the aircraft of his choice and decide upon his options. It wasn't long before John's standard model Pioneer 200, fitted with a variable-pitch propeller and powered by an 80-hp Rotax engine, arrived at Warren Newman and Logan McLean's Alpi agency. After assembly and a beautiful paint job by local microlight owner Alex McNab, ZK-WHC was ready for the five-hour flight to Flat Point.

Back at the station, ZK-WHC has become an extremely useful "animal". With the station boundary in excess of 35 kilometres in length and covering some quite rugged terrain, checking the perimeter now takes a mere 15 minutes. The Pioneer has also been kept busy over the last couple of months spotting for "cast" ewes (heavily pregnant sheep on their backs and unable to stand), and with a Simplex ground communication system installed it is an elementary job to direct mobile ground staff to the area. Stock, pig dog and poacher security checks are all part of WHC's portfolio, and the aircraft is also an extremely cheap, efficient way of getting to and from the local stock sales at Stratford and Feilding.

Again, John's lateral thinking has resulted in an innovative idea on how else to use the aircraft. Although still at the experimental stage, John is considering developing a flying mustering "dog" by playing recordings of barking and whistling through speakers installed under the wings.

With all this underway there seems little time left to take his son to flying lessons at Masterton, but knowing John that will undoubtedly be another success story. ☺

*A special thanks to Kerry Conner, CFI of Masterton's Ace Aviation Flying School, for her help with this article.*

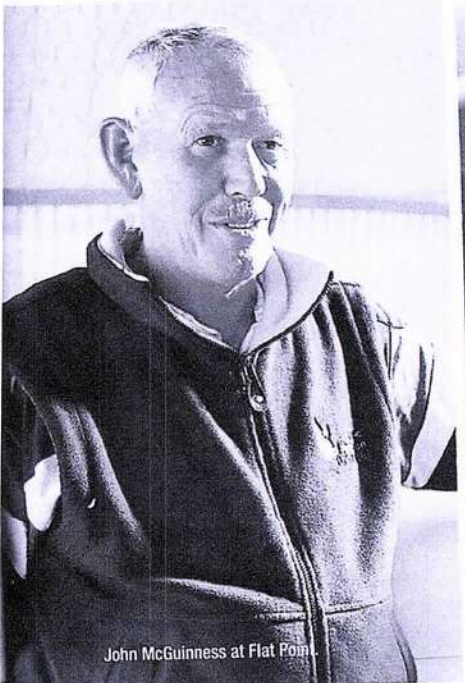




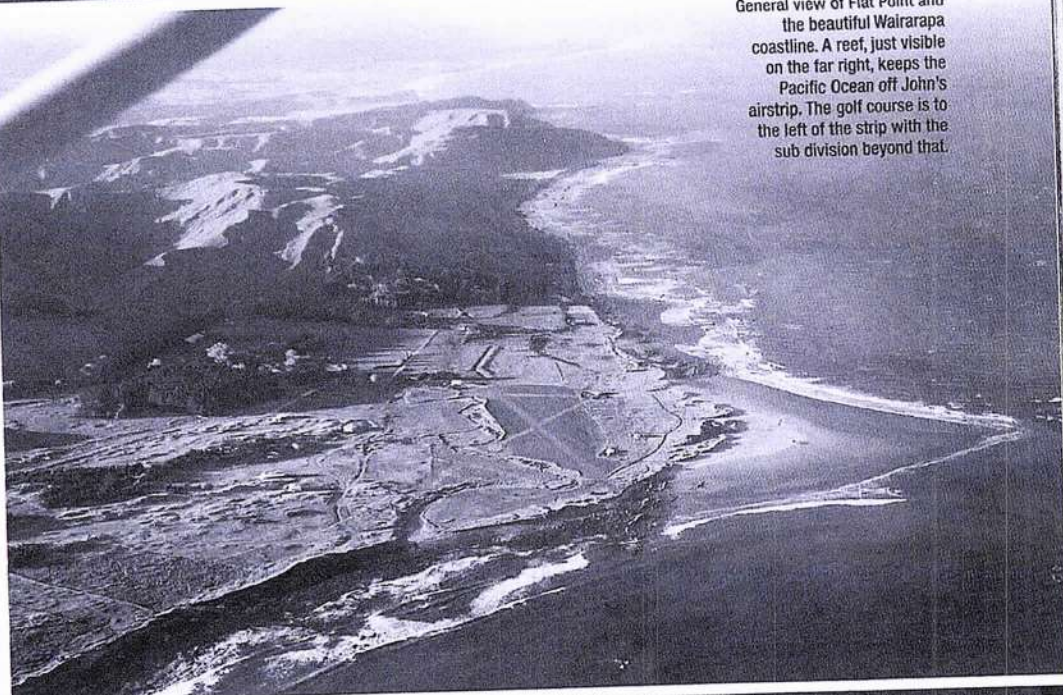
All photographs by the author.



Off Flat Point and with John McGuinness at the controls, the Alpi Pioneer 200 ZK-WHC as seen from the Maule M-5 camera ship ZK-FNG flown by Kerry Conner of Ace Aviation.



John McGuinness at Flat Point.



General view of Flat Point and the beautiful Wairarapa coastline. A reef, just visible on the far right, keeps the Pacific Ocean off John's airstrip. The golf course is to the left of the strip with the sub division beyond that.



The Alpi Pioneer 200's single piece canopy provides both excellent visibility and easy access. Note the well laid out dual control cockpit.



On the approach to Flat Point Station airstrip in Ace Aviation's Maule M-5 ZK-FNG.