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ZLIN TRENER and TRENER MASTER IN AUSTRALIA

By Geoff Goodall

One example each of the Czechoslovakian Zlin Trener and Trener Master aerobatic aircraft were imported from the early production series. It would be over twenty years before several of the later models of the highly specialised Zlin aerobatic aircraft were imported for the growing sport aircraft movement.

Zlin Z-126 Trener visiting Parafield SA in December 1962. Silver with red trim. *Photo by Geoff Goodall*

The Moravan (Zlin) factory was established in 1934 and its factory is still located near the town of Zlin on the Morava river, now in the Czech Republic. The prototype of their highly successful series of *Trener* (trainer) two seaters first flew on 20 October 1947, powered by a Czech built Walter Minor 4 engine and designated Z-26.

Development resulted in a new Z-126 *Trener 2* in 1953, in which the original wooden mainplane and tailplane were repaced with metal construction, and a more powerful Walter Minor 4 engine. Two years later Zlin announced the Z-226 series with even more powerful 160hp Walter Minor 6 engine, with specialised models for aerobatics, training and glider towing. Next came the Z-326 *Trener Master* with improvements including retractable undercarriage. A grand total of 1450 Trener Masters were produced, from the Z-26 through to the final model Z-726.

The first Zlin to be seen in Australia was Z-126 Trener VH-PXB imported in 1956 as a demonstrator by a newly formed Adelaide company Phoenix Aviation Co founded by Mr. P. Krawinkel who had an agency to market Czech aircraft. Application to import a Zlin 126 was made to the Department of Civil Aviation on Phoenix Aviation's behalf by Fawcett Aviation Pty Ltd at Bankstown on 22 March 1956. The Zlin OK-IFW was shipped to Sydney and assembled at Bankstown by Fawcett Aviation. During August 1956 it made demonstration flights at Bankstown along with twin-engined Aero 45 OK-JFJ also imported by Phoenix. Both aircraft flew from Bankstown to Parafield on 15 August 1956 and were available for demonstration flights at Parafield over the following two weeks.

On August 23 1956 the Zlin was demonstrated to the Adelaide Soaring Club at Gawler airfield, north of Adelaide and made available as a glider tug. It then towed an ES-49 sailplane from Gawler to Parafield to take part in a public demonstration by the Zlin and Aero 45. Visiting Czech pilot L. Brabec gave low-level inverted aerobatic displays in the Zlin including hands-off runs at 100 feet above the ground where his arms could be seen hanging down!

Both aircraft then had Australian certification inspections at Parafield, the Aero 45 being registered VH-PXA in September 1956. The Zlin Trener was registered VH-PXB on 2 November 1956 and DCA's Parafield office advised Head Office a week later on 9 November that it was ready for issue of its Certificate of Airworthiness.

Application to import a second Zlin 126 was made by Phoenix Aviation on 10 April 1957 and approved the following month, however it did not arrive.

On 30th March 1957 VH-PXB took part in the Sun Air Trial in Victoria flown by widely-known glider and aerobatic pilot Fred Hoinville. Two years later ownership passed from Phoenix Aviation to Aviation Services (SA) Ltd at Parafield, who were the South Australian Auster agents. Aviation Services was setting up flying training schools at SA country towns in competition with the Royal Aero Club of SA which had concentrated its training at Parafield. The Zlin was probably purchased to provide aerobatic training, however when Aviation Services added the first of four Chipmunks to their training fleet, the Zlin was placed up for sale.

The new owner was Mr. R. C. Wagner, Lake Waneary SA and the aircraft visited an airshow at Wentworth NSW on 28 August 1960. Two months later the Zlin was used as a trade-in on a new production Czechoslovakian LET L-40 Meta Sokol VH-RCW from the Australian agents Dulmison Aircraft, Sydney. VH-PXB attended an airshow at Scone NSW on 15 April 1961, and the following month was displayed at an airshow at Bankstown in an enclosure of Dulmison Aircraft's Czech aircraft range: Meta Sokol, Aero 145 and Morava. Advertising signs proclaimed *You can afford to purchase these aircraft. Easy terms through Lombard Australia*.

Later that year the Zlin was sold to Sydney private owner Mr. J. F. Leaver. On 1 April 1963 VH-PXB was parked at Bankstown when struck by a taxiing Tiger Moth VH-MWN piloted by its owner Mr. K. Attneave. The Tiger Moth's propeller struck the Zlin's fuel tank causing a fire which spread and burnt through the Zlin's airframe. The Tiger Moth was damaged by the fire but was pulled clear and quickly repaired, however VH-PXB was a write-off.

Zlin Z-126 Trener VH-PXB c/n 762

Registration	Date	Owner/Event
OK-IFW		Phoenix Aviation Co Ltd, Adelaide SA
VH-PXB	2.11.56	Phoenix Aviation Co Ltd, Adelaide SA
	8.7.59	Aviation Services (SA) Ltd, Parafield SA
	-	R. C. & V. Wagner, Lake Waneary SA
	28.11.60	Dulmison Aircraft Pty Ltd, Sydney
	7.11.61	J. F. Leaver, Sydney
	1.4.63	Destroyed in ground collision Bankstown
	1.4.63	Struck-off Register

Zlin Z-126 OK-IFW at Bankstown after assembly in 1956, Trener on the nose. *John Hopton Collection*

VH-PXB visited an airshow at Wentworth NSW in August 1960. *Photo by John Hopton*

Forlorn sight of VH-PXB at Bankstown in April 1963 after it was burnt out in a ground collision with a Tiger Moth on 1 April that year. *Photo by Michael Croker*

Zlin Trener Master

Meanwhile in 1959, Dulmison Aircraft Pty Ltd had been formed in Sydney by business entrepreneur Philip W. Dulhunty. He was determined to market modern production Czechoslovakian aircraft in Australia. His partners were Peter and Phil Brown of Kingsford Smith Aviation Services at Bankstown, Bruce Robertson and Audley “Snow” Allen of Allen Bros Asphalting, Sydney who owned one of the first Beech Bonanzas in the country VH-GPA.

The partners believed that the time was ripe for modern Czech aircraft to compete against the trickle of imported American Cessnas, Pipers and Beech because of 1950s Australian foreign currency restrictions on US dollars. Dulmison Aircraft Pty Ltd became Australian representatives for OMNIPOL, the Czech state owned agency, which marketed all aircraft produced by Government manufacturers. First type imported was the single-engine CZL L-40 Meta Sokol, which was an early sales success because of advanced features and economic fuel consumption. A total of nine Meta Sokols were sold 1960-1963. Dulmison also brought in three twin-engine Aero 145s, a CZL L-200 Morava and all metal Blanik gliders. However by 1962 US Dollar restrictions had ceased, resulting in a rapid increase in imports of American production light aircraft which killed off the market for Communist manufactured Czech products.

During a visit to the CZL factory at Kunovice in May 1960, the Dulmison Aircraft principals were invited to fly the Meta Sokol, Aero 145, Morava L-200 and even a Blanik glider. One of their instructors was Jiri Blaha, a Czech sport pilot who was European aerobatic champion. He had just returned from England where he was awarded the Lockheed Trophy for his aerobatic man oeuvres. When Jiri Baha flew an aerobatic display in the latest model **Zlin Z-326 Trener Master** the Australians were so impressed that an order was placed for a current production Z-326.

On 15 September 1960 Dulmision Aircraft Pty Ltd applied to DCA for an import permit for a Z-326 and after various delays its official import date was recorded as 9 May 1961. The Trener Master was shipped to Sydney and assembled at Bankstown, wearing Czech registration OK-OND. OMNIPOL sent Jiri Baha to Sydney as demonstration pilot for the Zlin, and another company pilot to fly the six seater twin engine L-200 Morava.

Dulmison Aircraft, keen to promote their Czech aircraft, arranged a trade day at Bankstown Airport on 21 May 1961. The Morava OK-OHC, Super Aero 145 VH-DUH, Meta Sokol VH-DUP and Zlin OK-OND were parked together, for inspection by potential customers. Each aircraft gave a flying display. Jiri Blaha flew the Zlin and the AHSA Journal of June 1961 recorded "*Blaha then proceeded with a polished spectacular display of precision aerobatics which left no doubt of his stature in this field"*

During June 1961, the Czech aircraft set off from Sydney on a demonstration tour to Melbourne, Tasmania and Adelaide via country airfields along the route. It was promoted by Dulmision Aircraft as a "flying circus", and generated a lot of press coverage. Jiri Blaha gave spirited aerobatics displays at stops along the way, including a Negative G Plus gyriscooic tumble, never seen before in Australia. Phillip Dulmison recalled :

"Jiri was a lanky, good-looking, easy-going guy with exceptional flying talent. He became very popular with all our aviators (and their girl friends) and the tour proved a great success. The problem for me was that I had to accompany him in the back seat of his Zlin on a tour of all the aero clubs from Adelaide through to Bankstown, and up to Brisbane, with a lot of towns on the way. Jiri was not happy just flying straight and level, even when flying cross-country from one town to another. The Zlin had a special carburetor and engine arrangement so that it could operate upside down for extended periods of time. To keep in practice, Jiri would executive a lot of his special manoeuvres while en route – with me in the back!

I can claim to be the only Aussie who has flown upside down across an open paddock at about ten feet above the ground, chasing a mob of kangaroos. I didn't see the roos much, however, because I had my eyes shut most of the time.

When demonstrating at an airport Jiri would do it solo. A special trick of his was to take off down the runway and when flying speed was attained, instead of climbing out, he would just retract his wheels and stay at ground level until his speed mounted. Then, in a gentle climb away, before the end of the runway was reached, he would INVERT the aircraft and climb away upside down. Coming in to land he would do the opposite."

Jiri Blaha in the Zlin Trener Master OK-OND performed aerobatics at each stop of the Dulmison Aviation Czech aircraft "flying circus" demonstration tour June 1961. Photo via Michal Orlita

Jiri Blaha with the Zlin OK-OND during the June 1961 tour. *Photos via Michal Orlita*

Two photos taken at Wagga NSW in June 1961 during the Dulmison tour of Czech built aircraft. Jiri Blaha is in the cockpit, surrounded by admiring personnel from the RAAF technical training school on the airport.
Photos by F. W. Burke

Zlin Z-326 Trener Master OK-OND at a Dulmison Aviation trade day at Bankstown in May 1961, with Dulmison's other Czechoslovakian products L-200 Morava and Meta Sokol. *Photo by Greg Banfield*

The two Czech pilots returned home after this tour. Their Australian hosts were later very concerned for their welfare in 1968 when Russia invaded Czechoslovakia with rumours that Omnipol pilots were taken away by the KGB. Philip Dulmison was delighted and relieved at a chance encounter with Jiri Blaha in 1974 at a hotel in Teheran, while Jiri was flying an executive jet for a Swiss company.

Dulmison Aircraft sold the Trener Master to Sydney aerobatic pilot Mr. Josef Hrabec. Over the previous two years Hrabec had owned Ryan STM VH-WEB and Auster J.5 Adventurer VH-KAG while he lived at Mudgee NSW. After Australian certification inspection at Bankstown and a brand new red white and black paint scheme, the Zlin was added to the Civil Register as VH-DBZ on 21 September 1962 under Hrabic's ownership. Two months later the aircraft suffered minor damage when Mr. Hrabic landed at Camden NSW with the undercarriage retracted. The DCA accident report stated bluntly that the pilot forgot to select the undercarriage. Quickly repaired, the Trener Master was a performer at airshows, including Canberra on 16 March 1963 where the airshow report in the AHSA Journal reported *"Zlin VH-DBZ provided one of the highlights of the day with a very polished aerobatic display".*

Josef Hrabic imported a used Cessna 180, which was registered VH-DEK in November 1963, and that same month he was advertising the Trener Master for sale as *"The World's best aerobatic aircraft"*. Its total airframe time was 180 hours, dual controls, retractable undercarriage. Full power and lubrication in inverted flight. The sale included a spare propeller and tyres, tow rig and tool kit.

With no prospective purchasers in Australia, VH-DBZ was sold to Mr. D. G. Owen of Christchurch New Zealand and shipped from Sydney in June 1964 on the *Waipori*, reaching Christchurch on 1st July. The next day it was trucked to Christchurch Airport for assembly where it was test flown on 29 July 1964 with new registration ZK-CHZ. The Zlin was used for aerobatic training at the Canterbury Aero Club at Christchurch Airport and registered in their name. Five years later it was sold in USA.

Zlin Z-326 Trener Master VH-DBZ c/n 586:

Registration	Date	Owner/Event
OK-OND		Moravan, Czechoslovakia
VH-DBZ	21.9.62	J. Hrabec, Sydney
	16.6.64	Struck-off Register as sold to NZ
ZK-CHZ	6.10.64	Canterbury Aero Club, Christchurch NZ
	69	Central Flying School Ltd, Christchurch
	6.6.69	Struck-off NZ Register as sold to USA
N4586	11.9.69	Registered in USA: Charles B. Glasscock, Cookesville, Tennessee
	22.3.84	Kem A. Sibbitt, Hyannis Nebraska
	14.5.21	Alice N. Sibbitt, Chandler Arizona
		Currently registered

VH-DBZ in a new paint scheme at an airshow at Canberra on 16 March 1963 where it was a star performer, flown by its Sydney owner Josef Hrabic. *Photo by Bob Neate*

VH-DBZ about to go flying at Bankstown in January 1964. *Photo by Geoff Goodall*

VH-DBZ was sold to NZ as ZK-CHZ. It is seen in late 1964 at Christchurch. Neville Parnell collection

References:

- Australian Civil Aircraft Register: Department of Civil Aviation and its successors
- US Civil Registers 1970, 1972: Federal Aviation Administration
- National Archives of Australia: DCA file on initial registration of VH-PXB
- National Archives of Australia: Accession B727/1: aircraft accident and incident reports
- AHSA Journal - various issues 1960 to 1964
- AHSNZ Journal July 1964: arrival of VH-DBZ at Christchurch
- DCA Aircraft Import Register: extracted by Melvyn Davis
- *The Advertiser* newspaper, Adelaide 16 August 1957
- *Aircraft* magazine, monthly, Melbourne November 1963
- *Never a Dull Moment*, Philip W. Dulhunty, self-published, Sydney 2009