



Tasmanian Airways – Hobart to Launceston Service - 1934 to 1935

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Tasmanian Airways

Tasmanian Airways Pty. Ltd., the first aviation company registered in Hobart, operated at two different times.¹ It was registered in Hobart on 10 December 1926, with the stated aim “to establish, maintain, and work lines of aerial conveyance between Tasmania and the mainland.”^{2,3}

Its first aviation venture was to undertake a Tasmanian Tourism promotional flight on the mainland in 1928, which also served to highlight its long-term ambitions. (See [TAHS2022.007](#)).

The second aviation venture was to operate a de Havilland Hawk Moth to carry passengers between Launceston and Hobart during 1934 and 1935. (Which is the topic of this report and we will explore soon).

The confirmation that these two activities were undertaken by the same company was made by the observation made by Neil Follett in his article on the Hawk Moth. He noted that in correspondence to the Controller of Civil Aviation regarding the Hawk Moth, the Tasmanian Airways correspondence was on “Tasmanian Motor Service” letterhead.⁶ Mr Fabert Fredrick de Mey, who promoted the Tourism promotional flight on behalf of Tasmanian Airways in 1928, was a Manager of Tasmanian Motor Service.⁴

De Havilland DH.75 Hawk Moth VH-UNW

The Hawk Moth was the first of many high-wing monoplane Moths that were designed as a light transport or for air-taxi role. Along with a pilot, it could carry 5 passengers. The aircraft had a fabric-covered steel-tube fuselage and wooden wings. The Hawk Moth was first flown on 7 December 1928. Only eight were built and two were imported into Australia.^{5, 6}

VH-UNW was the third Hawk Moth built and registered on 19 April 1930 in Australia to the de Havilland Aircraft Pty. Ltd. De Havilland used it as a demonstrator, including flying Amy Johnson on her visit in 1930.

Hart Aircraft Service then purchased the plane on 18 April 1931 and then sold it to Tasmanian Airways on 15 February 1934.⁶



VH-UNW, ca. 1935 (National Library of Australia)⁷

When the Tasmanian purchase was announced in February 1934, the “Examiner” provided some background on the plane: ⁸

The machine is a six-seater high wing cabin monoplane and is known for its favourable turn of speed. The construction of this type of aeroplane by the De Havilland firm was begun under peculiar circumstances. The editor of "Aeroplane," the English aviation journal (Mr. C. G. Grey), some years ago deplored the fact that there were no British cabin monoplanes of the six-seater type, and after considerable ventilation of the subject the Hawk Moth was laid down by the company, and a number were sold in England, Canada, and Australia. The machine originally purchased by the Hart Company and another is present in Queensland were the only two of the type to reach Australia, but nevertheless the machine has proved an extremely useful one.

While operated by the Hart Aircraft Service, the Hawk Moth now purchased by the syndicate had an extremely interesting career. It has figured in two aerial expeditions to Central Australia, once piloted by Captain Frank Neale, better known in Tasmania until some time ago as the pilot of the Matthews Aviation Company's amphibians, Cutty Sark and Windover. On the second occasion when the machine undertook an exploration of Central Australia, on behalf of a gold mining syndicate, it was piloted by Mr. A. J. Turner, chief pilot of the Hart Aircraft Service, who is now piloting the company's monoplane, Tasman, on the Bass Strait air service.



Haw Moth VH-UNW and Tasmanian Airways

At the start of 1934, Tasmanian Aerial Services were operating “Miss Launceston” (6 passengers) between Melbourne and Launceston (via Flinders or King Island), “Miss Currie” (3 passengers) and “Miss Flinders” (2 passengers) around Tasmanian aerodromes, including from Hobart to Launceston.

There were two other airlines operating between Melbourne and Launceston. Matthews Aviation were providing a weekly service with the Cutty Sark amphibian (4 passengers); and Hart Aviation Service were providing a bi-weekly service with the Avro Ten “Tasman”. Both these services stopped in early 1934, leaving Tasmanian Aerial Services as the only airline in Tasmania.

When Tasmanian Airways publicised their plans in February 1934, its spokesman by Mr. P. T. L. Taylor, who had been engaged as its pilot. He explained that they were proposes to a daily air service between Hobart and Launceston.¹ In particular, this would bring passengers from Hobart to Launceston to connect with the “Miss Launceston” Bass Strait Service.

Also in the companies planning was that the Government tender to operate six flights a week from Melbourne to Launceston for passengers and airmail services would be let in April 1934. With the increased passenger services from Melbourne to Launceston, there was an opportunity to operate a commuter service within Tasmania.

The Hawk Moth was flown from Essendon to Western Junction and then on to Hobart on 18 Feb 1934 by Mr. P. T. L. Taylor.⁹ The plane was then named the “City of Hobart”.

They did not commence their Hobart to Launceston Service until August and undertook charter work till then. In March 1934, it was reported they had tendered to undertake Metrological flights:¹⁰

The decision as to the commencement of the (Hobart to Launceston) service is, however, postponed until the announcement by the Commonwealth Government concerning the allocation of certain tenders called. Tasmanian Airways submitted a tender for the Hobart portion of a contract recently offered, by the Commonwealth Meteorological branch at Canberra for the carrying out of daily meteorological flights at Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Hobart, Alice Springs, and Daly Waters for the period of one month. It was stipulated that the contract was to commence not earlier than March 20, and not later than March 25, and the machines taking part will carry certain sealed instruments from which observations will be made. The 'planes concerned will be required to take the air at a fixed time each day and climb to not less than 10,000ft., and if possible, to 15,000ft.



For some years now flights of this nature have been carried out daily by the Royal Australian Air Force from the Laverton aerodrome, Victoria, and much valuable data has been obtained. If Tasmanian Airways obtain the contract for this work at Hobart, the commencement of the Hobart-Launceston service will be postponed: otherwise it will be commenced shortly

The contract was awarded to Larkin Aircraft Supply Co, who brought a Blackburn Bluebird biplane (VH-UNS) from the mainland to conduct the flights.¹¹

Tasmanian Airways erected a hangar in mid-April 1934 at Brighton which was big enough to accommodate the Hawk with wings folded and also provided engineering facilities.¹² (In 1934, Brighton Aerodrome was in use, Cambridge aerodrome was still a year away).

Before the commencement of the Hobart to Launceston service, the monoplane was used for private flights and air-taxi work, including about 100 hours of flying. Visits were made to Swansea, King and Flinders Islands, Smithton, Wynyard, and Latrobe, and other parts of the State. About 150 flights were made, and over 300 passengers carried.¹³

This included flying the Victorian King Cup rowing team from Hobart to Launceston on 10 May 1934.¹⁴ And in July 1934:¹⁵

An aerial survey of the Hydro-Electric Commission's proposed new undertakings in the Lake districts and on the West Coast took place yesterday, when the monoplane City of Hobart, piloted by Mr. P. L. Taylor, left Brighton at 11 a.m. with Messrs. J. G. Leckey, E. F. Rountree, two of the commission's engineers, and a photographer as passengers.

The machine first flew to the vicinity of the Ouse over the Derwent Valley to the northern end of Lake St. Clair, returning to Derwent Bridge, when an inspection was made of the proposed new power station site on the Nive River. The machine then flew towards Frenchman's Cap, and over Queenstown, Zeehan, and Rosebery.

The greatest height attained during the flight was 8000 feet, but at 5000 feet over Rosebery the visibility was so exceptional that the Nut at Stanley and practically the whole of the north-west coast could be discerned.

The City of Hobart returned to Brighton via the Great Lake and landed three hours after the start of the flight.

The inaugural flight of the Hobart to Launceston service was on 06 August 1934. During the Western Junction lay over, the plane undertook a special flight to Flinders Island to bring a woman's body to Launceston for burial.¹⁶

The plane schedule initially operated three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, leaving Brighton Aerodrome at 8.40 a.m. The flight north to Western Junction landed at 9.25



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a.m. which allowed passengers to connect with the Holyman's air service to Melbourne. The return trip left Western Junction at 3.00 p.m. Passengers were ferried from the aerodromes to both Hobart and Launceston.¹⁷ The one-way fare was 35/-, or \$180 today.

In November, the scheduled was altered its schedule so that it was running on boat days, (steamer service between Launceston and Melbourne), thus on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.¹⁸

Tasmanian Airways Schedules (as published in the "Examiner")	
<p>FLY TO HOBART Regular Service every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, by Hawk Monoplane City of Hobart. Leaving Hobart 7.15 a.m., arriving 8.45 a.m. Western Junction. Leaving Launceston on return 2.30 p.m. arriving Hobart 4.30 p.m. Fares, 35/- single, £3/6/6 return. Booking Offices: Tasmanian Airways Pty. Ltd., 101 MACQUARIE-ST., HOBART. Government Tourist Bureau, Launceston and Hobart, And F. H. Stephens Pty. Ltd., St. John-st., Launceston.</p>	<p>FLY TO HOBART Regular Service every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, by Hawk Monoplane City of Hobart. Leaving Hobart 8.30 a.m., arriving 10 a.m. Western Junction. Leaving Launceston on return 2.30 p.m. arriving Hobart 4.30 p.m. Fares, 35/- single, £3/6/6 return. Booking Offices: Tasmanian Airways Pty. Ltd. 101 MACQUARIE-ST., HOBART. Government Tourist Bureau, Launceston and Hobart; And F. H. Stephens Pty. Ltd., St. John-st., Launceston.</p>
22 October 1934	04 December 1934

"The Mercury" reported in its annual review of aviation for 1934:¹³

The service has been continuously maintained, and more than 400 passengers have been carried. The De Havilland has been in the air for 300 hours and has flown about 30,000 miles. Mr. P. T. L. Taylor had charge of the machine when the service was commenced, and early in October he transferred his activities to the Bass Strait service. Mr. R. H. Gordon has been flying the Tasmanian Airways machine since that time.

The service operated until early January 1935. Neil Follett again takes up the story:⁶

On 10 January 1935, whilst being flown by a Mr. R.N. Gordon, a piston seized necessitating a forced landing at Brighton, in northern Tasmania. Many letters were exchanged between Tasmanian Airways and the Controller of Civil Aviation (CCA) regarding changing the Lynx engine to a Wright Whirlwind.

On 1 May 1936 the CCA received a letter from a H. Purvis stating that he had, "recently purchased Hawk Moth in Tasmania, less engine.



There is no mention in news reports of the “City of Hobart” restarting the schedule. Advertising the service stopped on 12 January 1935. Thus, we assume the plane was not repaired and the plane was sold.

The service would have operated for about 5 months. Tasmanian Airways does not appear in news reports after this time.

Reflecting today, a comparison with Hart Aviation Service is made. Both operated services based upon one plane. When mechanical problems arose, in both cases significant engine failure, both decided not to pursue continuing the service.

The Pilots

Mr. P. T. L. (Len) Taylor, of Sorell, Southern Tasmania was the first pilot in charge of the Hawk Moth till he joined Holyman’s Airways in October 1934. He was one of the first pilots to learn to fly in southern Tasmania, trained by Captain Joe Francis at the Aero Club. He was the first pilot wholly trained in Tasmania to gain a "B" or commercial pilot's licence.¹⁹ He went on to have a successful career with Australian National Airways.

Mr. R. Gordon, was a member of the crew of the Avro Tens operated by (Kingsford Smith & Ulm) Australian National Airways and the Hart Aircraft Service Pty. Ltd. on the Bass Strait route.²⁰

¹ The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954) Wed 21 Feb 1934 Page 5

² The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954) Fri 31 Dec 1926 Page 4

³ The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954) Tue 23 Oct 1928 Page 9

⁴ Huon Times (Franklin, Tas. : 1910 - 1933) Fri 23 Nov 1928 Page 2

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Havilland_Hawk_Moth

⁶ <http://www.australianflying.com.au/news/the-de-havilland-dh-75-hawk-moth-in-australia>

⁷ <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-148165321/view>

⁸ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Fri 16 Feb 1934 Page 7

⁹ The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954) Mon 19 Feb 1934 Page 5

¹⁰ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Mon 19 Mar 1934 Page 6

¹¹ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Wed 4 Apr 1934 Page 6

¹² Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Wed 18 Apr 1934 Page 9

¹³ The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954) Wed 2 Jan 1935 Page 2

¹⁴ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Fri 11 May 1934 Page 6

¹⁵ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Fri 27 Jul 1934 Page 6

¹⁶ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Tue 7 Aug 1934 Page 6

¹⁷ The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954) Tue 31 Jul 1934 Page 5

¹⁸ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Wed 28 Nov 1934 Page 13

¹⁹ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Wed 20 Nov 1935 Page 12

²⁰ Examiner (Launceston, Tas. : 1900 - 1954) Thu 18 Oct 1934 Page 6