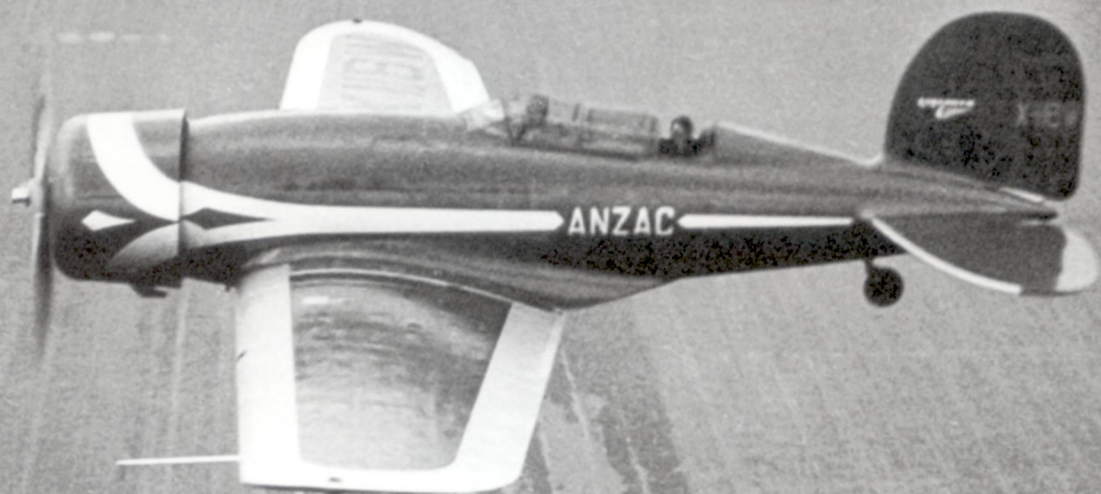


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LITTLE KNOWN COMMUTER AIRLINES



The expansion of a major machinery agency in Maryborough on the central coast of Queensland led to a substantial air charter and airline company. The Agency owned by local resident Bevan Whitaker held the Agency for the machinery and truck manufacturer, International Harvester, based in Geelong, Victoria. Whitaker also held the agency in Gympie and in the early 1970s took on the Rockhampton agency for the same trucks and machinery. The now widespread business necessitated Whitaker driving many kms a week to Rockhampton apart from regular trips to the Brisbane suburb of Rocklea to convey his employees to the International Harvester Queensland Distribution Centre to collect and drive trucks with other machines back to the local coastal centres.

After making many trips to Rockhampton and Rocklea, a contact and local Aero Club member suggested Whitaker use the Aero Club's Cherokee 140 aircraft for his Rockhampton and Rocklea trips, the latter using the nearby Archerfield Aerodrome saving many hours of driving allowing more time being productive in his office. It didn't take long for Bevan Whitaker to realise the benefits of using aircraft in his business leading to him setting up a charter operation under the Whitaker Pty Ltd. name. Before long, Whitaker was advertising two Piper Cherokee 6 aircraft, VH-PYD and VH-PPK along with a Beechcraft C55 Baron VH-ATB available for charter to anywhere in Australia. Apart from these three, the Aero Clubs Cherokee 140 was initially available through Whitaker while the Club sorted out financial problems. Entering the air charter business saw the company purchase a Cessna 172E VH-DIR, later replacing it with a more modern Cessna 172M VH-IEB.



Cessna 172 VH-DIR. Condobolin NSW. April 1964. Photo: Bob Neate.

The Noosa Shire was keen to have an air service to assist in the development of the local tourist industry which relied mainly on visitors from southern capitals and an air service direct into Noosa from Brisbane would assist greatly. Suitable land was available very close to the town of Noosa Heads. Two people expressed their interest, Bevan Whitaker and Snow Richards, owner of Toowoomba based Union Air and its associate Hervey Bay based Island Air who built their own runway at Pialba outside Maryborough. Island Air were active at coastal regions offering a range of tourist flights and charters so were in competition with Whitaker who purchased their competitor in 1980. Whitaker won the Shire's

Operated by Whitaker Pty Ltd.

Roger McDonald

approval to purchase and develop an aerodrome suitable for regular commuter services to Brisbane. The aerodrome is situated on low land alongside Lake Weyba and was known to flood easily so the new aerodrome's runway, taxiway and connecting road access needed much earthworks to give it wet weather capability. Following the completion of the new aerodrome, along with a functional Terminal, services commenced on 1 December 1975 to a twice daily Timetable using a new Britten Norman Islander VH-FCP. The aircraft departed Noosa at 8.00am arriving Brisbane 8.30am departing for Noosa at 9.00am, arriving at 9.30am. A similar pattern was flown in the afternoon with a 16.15pm departure for Brisbane. The Islander was available between regular flights for scenic tourist flights from Noosa and charters that required a 9-passenger aircraft. No maintenance was carried out at Noosa, so the aircraft positioned to Maroochydore for attention. A Beech Queenair 65, VH-CTE was introduced in March 1977 and operated in full Noosa titles with a small Whitaker Air Charter marks above. This aircraft was disposed of in early 1979 after a second B.N.I. VH-FCO was introduced. The first change to the routes was on April 9, 1979, when the daily early and afternoon flight to Brisbane was extended to Coolangatta using a third Islander VH-RUT purchased from Union Air in February 1978. The next expansion was the inclusion of Maroochydore on the Noosa - Brisbane route from 28 October 1979. This new arrangement caused the company to introduce the Whitaker Beech B55 VH-ATB twice daily flights commencing the day from Maroochydore where the aircraft was based. The Coolangatta extension was well publicised as the Gold Coast's Connector to the Sunshine Coast but passenger loads were low, and the connection ceased in April 1980. A new service between Brisbane and Maryborough commenced on October 28, 1980, at a twice daily frequency, initially using B.N.I. aircraft which now included a fourth aircraft, VH-EQE although it was used for only a short period until replaced by two Cessna 402Bs, VH-TWF and VH-TWZ in September and October 1980. At this time, the network was extended to Hervey Bay, north of Maryborough with 18 return flights weekly via Maroochydore and optional stops at Noosa as required. Bevan Whitaker was keen to promote tourism in the area and Noosa Air liveried aircraft were used on many scenic flights apart from contract flights into Frazer Island and Hervey Bay. Noosa Air flights received regular publicity as flights were a prize on TV's "The Don Lane Show" prize wheel. The need for a larger aircraft was satisfied with the introduction of a DHC-6 Twin Otter VH-TZL purchased from Aero Pelican with change of owner on June 24, 1981. The new aircraft served Noosa and Maroochydore alongside the B.N.I. on regular services. During the life of the company, aircraft were mainly registered in the name of Whitaker Pty Ltd and embraced a range of aircraft types, some of which were for charter work such as conveying cattle buyers around Queensland, scenic flights and contract regular flights to tourist areas on Moreton Island; Orchid Beach;



Piper PA-32 Cherokee Six, VH-PPK at Maryborough, Qld., January 1977. Photo: Mike Madden.



Piper PA-32 Cherokee Six, VH-PYD at Maryborough, Qld., January 1977. Photo: Mike Madden.



Beech Baron, VH-ATB at Eagle Farm, 5 May 1976. Photo: David Carter.



Cessna 172M, VH-IEB at Noosa Heads, Qld 14 November 1982. Photo: Mike Madden.



VH-EQE. Bankstown, NSW 1 December 1970. Photo Chris O'Neill



Britain Norman Islander, VH-FVP at Archerfield, Qld., 17 November 1975. Photo: Geoff Goodall.



Beech Queen Air, VH-CTE at Noosa Heads, Qld., 14 April 1978. Photo: Geoff Goodall.



Brittain Norman Islander, VH-FCD at Noosa Heads, Qld., 25 July 1981. Photo: Roger McDonald.



Brittain Norman Islander, VH-RUT at Maryborough, Qld., 15 April 1978. Photo: Geoff Goodall.



Beech Baron, VH-ATB at Noosa Heads, Qld., 16 April 1978. Photo: Geoff Goodall.



Britain Norman Islander VH-EQE at Moorabbin, Vic., August 1979. Photo Mike Madden.



Cessna 402, VH-TWF at Mascot 29 April 1981.



Cessna 402, VH-TWZ at Moorabbin, Vic., 24 October 1982.

Photo: Roger McDonald.



DHC-6 Twin otter, VH-TZL at Noosa Heads, Qld., 25 July 1981. Photo: Geoff Goodall.



Lady Elliott Island, Hervey Bay; Pialba, Bundaberg and Gladstone.

Sunstate terminal built by Noosa Air.

When Whitaker purchased Island Air, they were operating two Piper PA31-350s VH-TWD and VH-BKE and a range of smaller aircraft which were sold off after a short period. Heavy maintenance was done at Maroochydore by a company associated with Bevan Whitaker and as aircraft numbers increased, more was done at Maryborough. After taking up some services on behalf of Trans Australia Airlines in south-east Queensland with a further transfer of routes to Noosa Air pending,

Bevan Whitaker formed a new company, Sunstate Airlines which took over a number of Noosa Air aircraft. Since its inception, Noosa Air didn't align itself with either Ansett Airlines or Trans Australia Airlines due to Noosa Air flights being part of the packaged tours offered by both major airlines and because of this, an approach from TAA to take over some of their southern Queensland flights caused Bevan Whitaker to form a new company, Sunstate Airlines as a separate airline to be aligned with TAA. With this new operation commencing on December 7 1981, initially with two Embraer 110 Bandeirante aircraft, Noosa Air continued their now high frequency flights Brisbane - Maroochydore - Noosa flights with the DHC6 Twin Otter VH-TZL and two B.N.I aircraft although these two were withdrawn from Noosa Air services and transferred to Sunstate in July 1983 leaving the Twin Otter as the only Noosa Air aircraft. December 31, 1983 was the last day Noosa Air existed as all operations were transferred to Sunstate Airlines with the Noosa Air identification ON dropped in favour of Sunstate's OF identification.

All retained aircraft were re-painted into Sunstate Airlines colours and titling over the following period. Not surprisingly, Australian Airlines (renamed T.A.A.) purchased a 33.3% share of Sunstate during 1989, increasing this to 100% during 1991. The new Timetable effective November 14, 1991, dropped Noosa from the network and the aerodrome was later put up for sale. "Heritage Noosa" state the aerodrome was sold to a Sydney group in 1998 who ceased all commercial activities by 2000 with the aerodrome closing in February.

Today, the only regular activity on the old aerodrome is the base of helicopter operator, Salt Air who operate from two small hangars. From observation, the occasional aircraft lands on the old runway with many restrictions. The Sunstate name still survives as the operator of several Dash-8 aircraft in Queensland as part of QantasLink.

Official Department of Civil Aviation figures record Noosa Air carried over 113,412 passengers during its 8-year life.

NOOSA AIR

Daily Commuter

Service

Noosa - Brisbane

EFFECTIVE FROM 7th MARCH, 1976

Departs Noosa 8.15 a.m. and 2.55 p.m.

Departs Brisbane 9.30 a.m. and 4.00 p.m.

SINGLE FARE \$15

Children Under 15 years HALF FARE

Children Under 3 years not
occupying a Seat FREE

BAGGAGE - One Piece FREE
Additional pieces at applicable current
rates

FREIGHT - 22 cents per kilo with minimum of
50 cents per article

CHARTER RATES

Britten-Norman Islander —
Twin Engine, 9 Passenger \$110 per hour

Beechcraft Baron C55 —
Twin Engine, 5 Passenger \$85 per hour

Cherokee Six —
Single Engine, 5 Passenger \$55 per hour

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