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The Border Mail

weekender.



Picture MARK JESSER

COME FLY WITH ME

Three pilots have been helping people get in and out of Albury for more than 20 years

JANET HOWIE reports: P36-37

COVER STORY

weekender.

EXPERIENCED TEAM:

Regional Express captains Tony Bugden, Barry Anderson and Peter Martin are familiar faces flying out of Albury Airport. **Picture: MARK JESSER**



BORDER PILOTS FIND RARE AIR

Yes, there are ups and downs in aviation, but three Albury captains say it's been a privilege to serve their community for so many years. JANET HOWIE reports

FOR more than two decades, Tony, Barry and Peter have reached for the skies without losing sight of what they love on the ground.

The three captains have been flying passengers in and out of Albury for at least 20 years each, as well as living life on the Border. Between them, Barry Anderson, Peter Martin and Tony Bugden have completed more than 36 thousand flights for Regional Express on the SAAB 340 aircraft.

Mr Martin celebrated his 20th anniversary with Rex last month, joining his colleagues to create a record of continuous service not common in the aviation industry.

While the men might fly 1500 kilometres in a morning between Albury, Sydney, Orange and back or hop to Melbourne and King Island, they relish returning home each night.

"When you want to settle down, you want to have a bit of stability in your life so finding a base that worked as far as minimal overnights and provided the opportunity to have a family and have a lifestyle, that's the beauty," Mr Anderson said.

The three captains met *The Border Mail* in their Albury Airport office, a room they prefer to spend as little time as possible in between arriving, debriefing and going home. Rex has two aircraft based in Albury, as well as nine captains, seven first officers and seven flight attendants.

"And most of them have been regional kids, if you like," Mr Martin said.

"Baz is from Echuca, Tony's from north of Wagga, I'm from Brocklesby."

Growing up on a farm, Mr Martin once thought flying could only be done out of capital cities.



TWENTY-YEAR TRIO: Barry, Tony and Peter have appreciated being able to fly aeroplanes and still live regionally. **Picture: MARK JESSER**

"My extended family joke about me being the family shiny bum because I don't work with my hands for a living," he said.

"I say I usually attend three or four paddocks fairly regularly, they're called Tasmania, Victoria, NSW and Queensland."

Mr Anderson used to enjoy operating farm machines like bulldozers and tractors.

"I guess the aircraft is an extension of that, realistically it's a man-made piece of equipment that we manipulate," he said.

"To me the aeroplane's the ultimate."

Having arrived at Albury Airport in the late 1990s, the trio experienced their airline's toughest challenge in September 2001 when the then-Kendell Airlines was put into administration upon the collapse of Ansett Australia. As the world reeled from the September 11 US terrorist attacks, flights were grounded overnight, with check-in staff fielding inquiries while dealing with the shock of losing their own jobs.

The Border Mail reported in the aftermath 116 flights a week and about 40 jobs could be lost in Albury, but ripple effects were felt throughout the community in accommodation, hospitality and taxi services.

About 60 Kendell employees and their families marched down Dean Street to highlight the impact of losing the airline.

weekender.



RIGHT: Kendell Airlines captains John Arnold and David Butlin in October 2001 with some freshly baked jam drops to hand out during flights. The story travelled internationally.

LEFT: Kendell Airlines staff rally in Albury after the 2001 Ansett Australia collapse. Barry Anderson stands with his then eight-year old son Bryce, who is now a captain himself.

BELOW: Firefighters salute Barry Anderson's 20 years of flying with Regional Express and its predecessor in 2017.



Meetings with Farrer MP Tim Fischer and Transport Minister John Anderson led to a \$750,000 federal government grant to restart the airline's services in Victoria and NSW, an occasion that was widely celebrated in October, 2001.

"We ended up with a new buyer and Rex is borne out of that so we've all been very much part of that whole process of the airline that's here today," Mr Anderson said.

All major events, but the three Albury pilots recall it was the tale of jam drops, made by the Kendell pilots for passengers soon after, that really went global.

"That story, someone mentioned the captain made the biscuits that were served on the flight and my aunty that was in England heard about it, it did go far and wide," Mr Anderson said.

When Mr Martin reached his 20-year milestone in September, a recipe for jam drops featured among the presentations.

The flying fraternity is a close knit one - "When an aeroplane goes over, most people know what it is, we know who it is" - and the Rex team in Albury especially so.

"It's a great job and what makes the job

are the people you fly with," Mr Bugden said. "I never go to work and not enjoy myself."

Mr Anderson's son Bryce, who marched alongside him down Dean Street as a child in 2001, is now a captain himself in Adelaide while the company has boasted a flight crew of a father, son and daughter.

The Albury stalwarts continue to find variety and challenge each day.

And there's the scenery to admire.

"You see a lot of sunsets," Mr Bugden said. "When you're dodging around storms, keeping away from them, you see quite a few lightning bolts. Pete and I were sitting together, we had St Elmo's Fire over the windscreen. We were flying back one night to Albury and this comet streaked across the windscreen. We have got the best changing view out of our office window."

Technology has also advanced, with ground-based navigation aids made redundant by GPS systems and about 20 kilograms of hard copy manuals replaced by iPads.

Minor malfunctions can and do occur, but the three captains have not experienced many issues during flights.

"There's often a saying in aviation, green

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You see a lot of sunsets. When you're dodging around storms, keeping away from them, you see quite a few lightning bolts. We have got the best changing view out of our office window

Tony Bugden

is good, red is bad and amber's 'raise an eyebrow'," Mr Bugden said. "That reflects the type of checklists that we have."

What about difficult passengers?

All three men laughed.

Mr Bugden said reasons like air traffic control or the weather could bring delays and some people did struggle to accept that.

"We want to go to work and get home as quickly as we can too, so when we're delayed, we don't delay just to make your day bad," he pointed out.

Mr Martin said he's not had to divert because of passengers causing trouble, but some did have to be warned.

"By and large, the beauty of operating out of here is we know a lot of our passengers too," he said.

"Particularly the Melbourne service, in my head I call it the suit shuttle. There's a number of regular passengers that have been flying longer than we have out of Albury."

Mr Anderson liked seeing the regulars.

"You actually know the people and you really feel connected," he said.

"You are very privileged to operate out of here to service our community."