

THE AUSTRALIAN VINTAGE AVIATION SOCIETY



1909 JOHNSON MONOPLANE

In 1909 the Johnson brothers (of marine outboard motor fame) started building their own aircraft. Quite impressive considering they had never actually seen one before! They also built their own design 60 hp two stroke engine to power it. It did not have a throttle, it could only run at full power or off.

When finished, the brothers discovered the machine to be too tail heavy and ended up replacing the heavy wooden fuselage with a duralium (an early type of aluminium) one.

This is the first aircraft to use monocoque construction (the structural loads of the fuselage are carried through the skin of the fuselage – not the structure underneath). It was the first monoplane in America. It was also the first successful tricycle gear aircraft and the first to be fitted with a brake.

The aircraft first flew in 1911. The brothers taught themselves how to fly with this and charged people 25 cents each to watch them, earning the brothers up to \$600 per weekend. It flew for three years with no accidents.

The design and performance was years ahead of its time. That combined with the fact the brothers lived in the backwaters of Indiana, far away from mainstream America, their monoplane never generated enough attention to become a saleable item.

The aircraft rotted away in a barn whilst the brothers turned their efforts to a more lucrative market – outboard engines for boats, which is where they made their fame and fortune.

TAVAS own the only reproduction of this aircraft in the world. It was built by Herbert Seiser in South Africa, using a model and drawings provided by the Johnson Brothers to the Smithsonian institute. It was donated to TAVAS in mid 2014.

SPECIFICATIONS:

Span: 11.00 m (36 ft)
Length: 10.36 m (34 ft)
Weight: 340 kg (750 lbs)

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