

# **2026 ASRA Nationals Tooraweenah, NSW**

By Geoffrey Learmonth (Organising Committee Member)

The 2026 ASRA Nationals was held at Tooraweenah, NSW over a 2.5 day period from Friday to Sunday, 17-19 April and was open to all ASRA members and their partners/guests.

The event attracted 53 attendees and 18 aircraft. Feedback received to date has been positive.

## **Overview**

The 2026 ASRA Nationals commenced with a meet and greet and welcoming dinner held in the Tooraweenah Memorial Hall on the Friday evening, and concluded on the Sunday evening with a farewell dinner at the local village pub, the Mountain View Hotel.

A casual breakfast and morning tea was provided on both the Saturday and Sunday in the Memorial Hall, with all food events sponsored by ASRA.

ASRA was very grateful for the kind invitation from the Arthur Butler Aviation Museum (ABAM) to host the 2026 ASRA Nationals at Tooraweenah. ABAM worked closely with the local Tooraweenah Lions Club, who provided catering for the Friday night dinner, together with logistical support to ensure the event ran smoothly.

As with the 2023 Quirindi Nationals, competitive flying events were not conducted due to insurance and safety considerations. Instead, the focus was on technical presentations, workshops, and fostering the camaraderie of the gyroplane community.

Pilots were advised that they could, at their discretion, undertake private flights over the weekend in accordance with normal operating requirements. The aim was to conclude the formal component of each day by 1:00 pm, leaving the balance of the day free for relaxing, sightseeing, socialising or enjoying the spectacular Warrumbungle Ranges.

Planning for the 2026 ASRA Nationals commenced approximately six months prior to the event, and was made possible by a dedicated team of helpers, including:

- Our speakers and presenters for their informative and engaging sessions.
- ABAM and the Tooraweenah Lions for their extensive logistical, catering, and operational support.
- The ASRA President, Mark Divito, and the ASRA Board for funding and supporting the event.
- ASRA members and volunteers who fulfilled key roles, including fuel, Marshals, merchandise sales, IT support, photography and catering.
- Our volunteer team responsible for the hall setup and “make good” at the end of the Nationals.
- Local accommodation providers, food suppliers, and other service providers.

ASRA also gratefully acknowledges the financial contribution provided by CASA under its Safety Sponsorship Program.

## **A Few Stats**

- 53 attendees, including ASRA members and their partners/guests.
- 18 aircraft in attendance, including two fixed-wing aircraft.
- Representation from five states: NSW, QLD, VIC, SA and WA.
- Furthest travelled: Perth (WA) and Port Douglas (QLD), both gyronauts were awarded the “virtual gold gyro”.
- Attendees arrived by both aircraft and vehicle.
- Six presentations/workshops conducted across Saturday and Sunday.
- Strong attendance at all sessions, ranging from 37 to 47 attendees.
- Approximately 320 meals were served over the 2.5 days, plus numerous teas, coffees and nibbles were consumed.
- 53 participants attended at the Sunday farewell dinner, including ASRA, ABAM and Lions members.
- Approximately 7 motorhomes, caravans, and camping setups on-site, with others using local accommodation.

An event of this nature provides a meaningful economic benefit to the local community through accommodation, catering, fuel, and associated services. The Organising Committee is pleased that the 2026 ASRA Nationals provided an opportunity to support the local economy.

## **About Tooraweenah**

Tooraweenah is a welcoming rural village with a rich history dating back to the mid-1800s, a strong community spirit, and is within close proximity to the Warrumbungle Ranges. Dubbo is located approximately 105 km to the southwest.

Modern day Tooraweenah is a small rural community within the Gilgandra Shire, featuring a heritage streetscape including a pub, post office, caravan park, police station, mechanical garage (no fuel available), and friendly residents. Agriculture remains central to the local economy.

The village proved to be an excellent venue for the Nationals. Presentations and workshops were held in the Memorial Hall, which provided excellent facilities including lighting, power, kitchen amenities, seating, tables and a stage.

The aerodrome is located approximately 1.25 km from the village, is relatively isolated, has minimal competing traffic, and is well suited to gyroplane operations. It features a grass runway (04/22).

Whilst fuel is normally sourced from Gilgandra and Coonabarabran, ABAM arranged for ULP95 to be delivered directly to the aerodrome for gyroplane operations during the Nationals.

## **Arthur Butler and Butler Air Transport**

Between 1938 and 1958, the Tooraweenah Aerodrome served as a major aviation hub for Butler Air Transport, connecting western NSW and southern Queensland with Sydney.

Cecil Arthur Butler (1902–1980) founded Butler Air Transport in 1934, pioneering passenger and mail services across country NSW and Qld. Post war expansion saw the airline become one of the country's most respected independent carriers until a hostile takeover in the late 1950's led to its absorption into Airlines of New South Wales.

Butler's legacy continues through his strong connection with Tooraweenah, the Arthur Butler Aviation Museum (ABAM), the Memorial Aerodrome, and through his grandson, Mark Pitts (Vice President, ABAM).

## Presentations and Workshops

<b>All presentations were delivered in the Memorial Hall with both afternoons free for sightseeing, relaxing, socialising or flying</b>	
<b>Sat, 18 April. Presentations concluded about 12.30 pm.</b>	
1A	<b>All things Tooraweenah - Gary Weston (President, ABAM) and Patty Webb (ABAM Member).</b> The presentation included the history of Tooraweenah, the local economy, the people and what makes the village tick. The local economy is centred around agriculture, with mixed farming at its core. Broadacre cropping, primarily wheat and other cereals and is complemented by livestock production, including sheep, wool, fat lambs and beef cattle. Tourism is also growing given the proximity of Tooraweenah to the magnificent Warrumbungle Ranges.
1B	<b>Arthur Butler and Butler Air Transport - Mark Pitts, Vice President, ABAM.</b> An engaging presentation was delivered on the history of Arthur Butler and Butler Air Transport, highlighting the challenges and obstacles faced in building a business in the early days of aviation in Australia. As Arthur Butler's grandson, Mark brought a personal and heartfelt perspective to the story.
2	<b>Gyroplane adventure to parts of Outback NSW &amp; SA - Geoffrey Learmonth, ASRA Member.</b> The presentation covered various aspects of the trip in May /June 2025 to Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre, including the gyro team, the reasons behind why the flight plan was chosen, what they saw and did, together with the highlights of the trip.
3	<b>Gyroplane expeditions, Tips and Tricks - Mark Regan, ASRA Head of Airworthiness and Maintenance.</b> The presentation covered Mark's multiple gyro flying expeditions as part of a group to various parts of Australia and covered things to bear in mind for ensuring a successful trip, including anecdotes about several noteworthy situations.
<b>Sun, 19 April. Presentations concluded at 1.00pm.</b>	
4	<b>Rotax engines and maintenance tips - Chad Summers, Chief Engineer New England Aviation and Harry Cathcart, Bert Flood Imports (Rotax).</b> The workshop was extremely informative and both Chad and Harry were armed with an array of Rotax engine parts, including camshafts, crankshafts, carburettors, spark plugs, cylinder heads, oil and air filters and numerous examples of Rotax procedures of "do's and don'ts." A big eyeopener for everyone.
5	<b>ASRA accident database insights and CASR Part 103 update - Mark Regan, ASRA Head of Airworthiness and Maintenance.</b> The presentation on the ASRA accident data base covered circa 40 years and was thoroughly well researched and primarily focused on the main causes of take-off and landing accidents, emphasising Human Factors. This was followed by a 25-minute update on CASR Part 103, and what is being done to allow for certain factory-built gyros in the future to fly over built-up areas.
6	<b>Flight of the Phoenix" - Phillip Harper, ASRA Member.</b> Phillip shared the story behind the re-building of gyroplane G2637. An inspiring account of determination, problem-solving, and engineering capability. The presentation detailed the many challenges faced throughout the project, often at points where most people would have walked away, and how these were overcome through persistence and ingenuity. The successful return of G2637 to the air stands as a powerful example of what can be achieved with commitment, skill and engineering excellence.

## Promotion of the 2026 Nationals

Promotion of the Nationals was carried out over several months prior to the event via:

- Gyro News (Summer and Autumn editions).
- Regular posts on the Gyroplanes Australia Facebook page, with imagery.
- Email communications to ASRA members.
- SMS updates.
- Personal phone calls and follow up.

A formal registration process applied which assisted with event planning and catering. An Information Pack was provided to all attendees, including:

- Event program.
- Images of Tooraweenah and surrounds.
- Accommodation options.
- Aerodrome information.
- Nearby aerodrome listings.
- CASA ramp check summary (as its good to be prepared).

The Organising Committee identified **16 key reasons** to attend:

- Learn from ASRA accident data (1984 to 2025).
- Practical Rotax maintenance insights.
- G2637 “Flight of the Phoenix”, an incredible story of determination, overcoming challenges and engineering excellence.
- The Arthur Butler and Butler Air Transport story.
- Expedition planning insights.
- CASR Part 103 -what matters.
- Outback gyroplane adventure to parts of NSW and SA.
- Fly in or drive in.
- Welcoming BBQ dinner (Friday).
- Farewell dinner (Sunday).
- Breakfast and morning tea provided (Sat & Sun).
- Gyro-friendly airfield.
- Rich aviation heritage.
- Rural village setting.
- Warrumbungle Ranges scenery.
- Community, friendships, and shared learning.

## Acknowledgements and a BIG Thank You

The success of the 2026 ASRA Nationals was made possible by the following:

Arthur Butler Aviation Museum (ABAM).

For hosting the event and providing extensive logistical support, including fuel for gyroplane operations, hall and aerodrome presentation.

- Gary Weston (President).
- Mark Pitts (Vice President).
- Patty Webb and Jenny Sanford, supported by other ABAM members.

Tooraweenah Lions Club

For outstanding catering and providing considerable operational support throughout the Nationals.

- Gary Gesell (President), supported by other Lions members.

Gilgandra Shire Council

- Cheryl Tillman (PA system support).

The Presenters

For their considerable expertise and commitment across all sessions.

ASRA President and Board.

- Mark Divito and the ASRA Board for funding and supporting the event.

Volunteers and Helpers

Including ASRA merchandise sales, fuel marshals, IT support, photography, catering, and Memorial Hall setup with all things ASRA, and the “make good” teams at the end of the Nationals.

- Allan Reid - ASRA merchandise sales.
- Marina Bonaventura Maas- ASRA merchandise sales.
- Paul Cummins - fuel marshal.
- Mick Kelaher- fuel marshal.
- Phillip Harper - IT support.
- Murray Scherf - event photography.
- Christiane Birkett- event photography.
- Julie Scherf - Breakfast and morning tea catering.
- Ruth Lax- breakfast and morning tea catering.
- Pam Learmonth - breakfast and morning tea catering, everything ASRA hall set up and many weeks of event planning and preparation.
- Alan Eyre – everything ASRA hall set up.
- Our volunteer ASRA “army” for the hall “make good” at the end of the Nationals, which was managed with military precision and timing.
- Photo credits for images used in this publication - Lee Duxbury, Steve Bell and Grant Dyer.

(My apologies to anyone inadvertently omitted)

## Service Providers and Suppliers

- Mountain View Hotel - special thanks to Ashley Jenkins and Kerry Carbury.
- Tooraweenah Caravan Park -special thanks to Scott Quilter.
- Cross Roads Cabins -special thanks to Steve Watt.
- Other Local and Gilgandra accommodation providers.
- IGA Gilgandra.
- Home Timber & Hardware Gilgandra.
- Audio Plus Dubbo.
- Sixt Car Rental Dubbo.

(My apologies to any businesses inadvertently omitted)

ASRA also gratefully acknowledges the financial contribution provided by CASA under its Safety Sponsorship Program.

## **In Closing**

Thank you to all attendees for supporting the 2026 ASRA Nationals at Tooraweenah, particularly those who travelled long distances. Without engaged and committed attendees events like this would not be possible.

The 2026 ASRA Nationals provided a valuable opportunity to reconnect with friends, meet new friends, share knowledge, and further strengthen the gyroplane community.

We look forward to seeing you at the ASRA Nationals in 2027



Tooraweenah Memorial Hall



Tooraweenah Memorial Hall  
with all things ASRA



Aircraft arriving for Nationals



Friday Night Dinner in the Memorial Hall



A breakfast fit for kings, queens & gyronauts



**Presentations 1A & 1B - All Things Tooraweenah +  
Arthur Butler + Butler Air Transport**



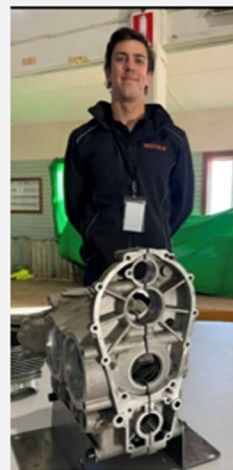
Presentation No.2- Gyro Adventure to  
Parts of Outback NSW & SA



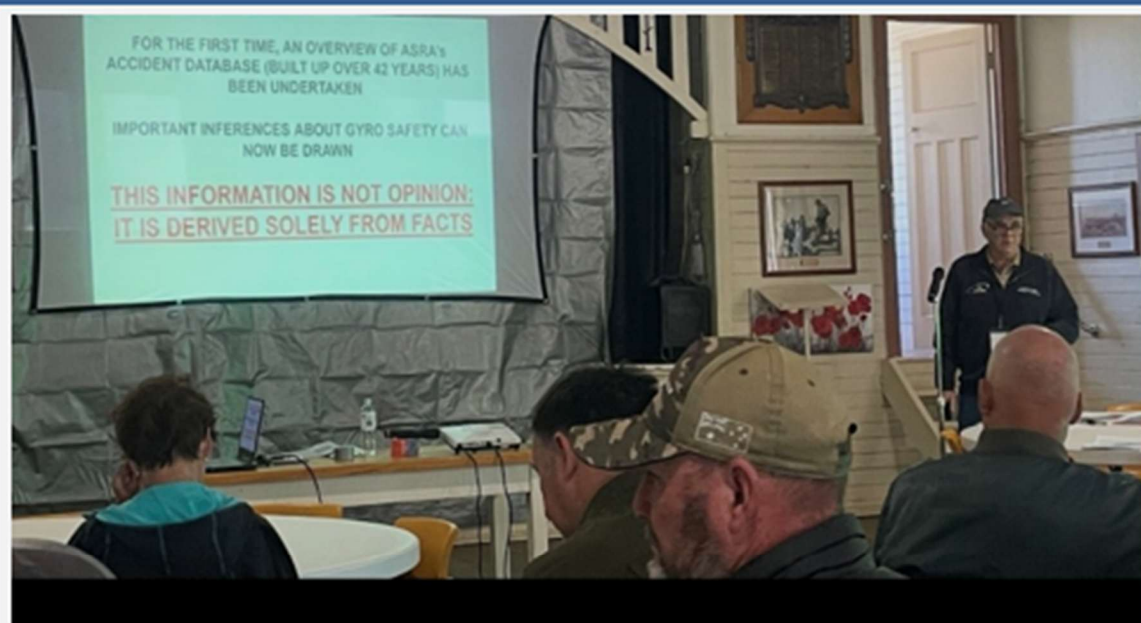
Presentation No.3-Expeditions,Tips & Tricks



Presentation No.4 - All Things Rotax



Presentation No.4 - All Things Rotax



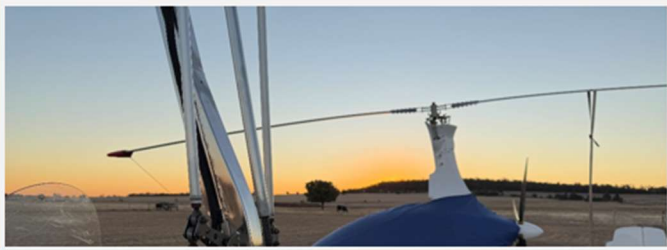
Presentation No.5- ASRA Accident Data Base + Part 103



Presentation No.6- "Flight of the Phoenix" - a story of determination, overcoming challenges & engineering excellence



Selection of Aircraft



Selection of Aircraft



Selection of Aircraft



Selection of Aircraft



Selection of Aircraft



Selection of Aircraft



Gyronauts, Friends & ABAM Members



**Sunday Night Farewell Dinner**