

Aviation fan on a high over new venture



by Collette Devlin

Bruce Conway has always wanted to work in aviation but repairing microlight planes was as far as he got - until now.

A chance meeting with the European manufacturer of Skyleader aircraft has led to the Invercargill man being appointed as its New Zealand distributor.

Mr Conway has set up SkyFreedom Aviation and will import microlight and light sport aircraft from the Czech Republic into Invercargill.

He and his wife Lois set up Alpha Outdoors Ltd last year to develop the new business venture.

He also took part in a government business mentoring programme, which was a big factor in his decision to go ahead with the venture.

JOHN HAWKINS/Fairfax NZ

TAKING FLIGHT: SkyFreedom Aviation owner Bruce Conway has started to import and sell microlight and light sport aircraft in Invercargill

Invercargill business consultant Janet Brooker was his mentor and her advice proved invaluable, he said. It took a lot of research, paper work and months of negotiations but now he was looking forward to the future.

His research showed there was a market for his product in Southland and throughout the country.

He would like to sell five aircraft each year, he said.

He believed his venture was a first for Southland.

"I don't know of any other business that sells carbon-fibre aircraft in the South Island."

Fiordland Aero Club president Murray Hagen was the pioneer and one of the first people in New Zealand to fly a microlight in the late 1970s. Mr Hagen had also been a great mentor.

Mr Conway imported his first carbon GP One aircraft - the first of its type in New Zealand - in December and has spent weeks preparing it for its CAA inspection for pre-approval in the light sport aircraft category. The price is \$110,000. The two-seat aircraft, which has a "whole aircraft" parachute, would be ideal for aero clubs, and private pilots and was seen as being affordable and of high quality, he said.

Instructors, farmers and recreational fliers liked its 600kg maximum takeoff weight, fuel-efficient shape and robust undercarriage and several clubs were interested, he said.

The 80hp engine aircraft was transported to Manapouri this week and will be based at the Fiordland Aero Club's new hangar.

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