



Cat. No. 0006

The John Pollnitz restored Slingsby T31B “Tandem Tutor”, c. 1956



[The Australian Gliding Museum's Slingsby T31B at Bacchus Marsh Airfield: photograph – B. Duckworth]



[The T31B at Caversham c 1961; photograph – A. Ash collection]

The Slingsby T31B was developed as a standard trainer from the single seat T8 Kirby Tutor dating from 1937. The first T31 took to the air in September 1950. The Museum's T31B [VH-GDB] is one of five of this type to grace Australian skies. Three including VH-GDB were assembled in Australia from kits supplied from Slingsby. The other two were delivered by Slingsby as completed airframes. To date only four remain of which two are airworthy.

After completion by Geoff Higginson, the T31B, later registered VH-GDB, was taken to Caversham Airfield, then home of the Gliding Club of Western Australia (GCWA), for its first test flights on 29 July 1956. The glider formed the basis of the Club's dual training programs until 15 June 1958 when it crashed on approach at Caversham. The wreckage was sent to Edmund Schneider Pty Ltd in Adelaide for repair. However, the repairs were abandoned in favour of the purchase of a new ES52 Kookaburra to service the Club's training needs.

The damaged airframe was purchased in 1961 by John Pollnitz, a carpenter/joiner by trade and an ab-initio member of the Waikerie Gliding Club. Harry Schneider repaired the port wing spars and John proceeded to rebuild the badly damaged fuselage with the assistance of his friend Cleve Gandy. He desired the glider to have a prettier, more Kookaburra like nose than its original form. As a result the fuselage shape forward of the cockpit is unique amongst T31s. A fully enclosed canopy, spoilers and pitch trim were added. The main wheel was moved forward a little and the nose-skid was not refitted. The pitot and static pick-ups were fitted cleanly into the nose of the fuselage to reduce drag.

The first flight of the newly rebuilt glider took place on Sunday 14 October 1961 at Clare S.A., Cleve Gandy and Col McKinnon taking it to 4000 feet on a 45 minute flight. After that the glider served at Clare until it was sold to John Harding and Stan Nightingale of Dubbo in December 1962. On demonstrating the glider at Gawler, Cleve Gandy and Stan Nightingale reached a height of 10,000 feet during a 2 hour flight.

The glider was sold to the Wimmera Soaring Club in mid-1963. It took on a different appearance with the reinstatement of the skid forward of the existing main wheel position and the decoration of the fuselage with the Club's Brolga emblem. On 14 March 1966 the Wimmera Soaring Club took delivery of a Kookaburra and put the T31B on the market in order to finance the new acquisition. The lucky purchaser was the Pioneer Valley Soaring Club of Mackay in Queensland. The history from then has not been recorded. Eventually the glider was collected by Bill Riley of Tocumwal who donated it to the Museum in 2001. It has been restored to flying condition.