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17 Years Flying with Sharp Airlines

Sharp Airlines, south-west Victoria's own airline, was founded 17 years ago this August.

"17 years ago, there was just me, a second pilot and one single-engined aircraft", said Malcolm Sharp, founder and Managing Director of Sharp Airlines. "Today, we have 22 staff and a fleet of 10 aircraft".

"17 years ago, we flew locally and when we needed a twin-engined aircraft we had to charter it. Today we fly 44 flights a week and will cover 15,000km between Hamilton, Portland, Essendon and Avalon".

Seventeen years on, Sharp Airlines is Victoria's only family-owned airline. It is Victoria's major regional airline, and one of Australia's most important and visible regional airline companies.

"Fortunately, with a dedicated staff and hard work, we've been able to grow and expand", said Mr Sharp. "As well as scheduled commercial airline services, we provide charter services, professional pilot training, engineering services, specialist aerial work, and a program of 'flying visits' where clients choose their own destination".

Inspired by Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon, Malcolm Sharp started flying as a 15 year-old and gained his pilot's licence at 17. To raise the necessary funds for flight training, he worked as a trades assistant on the Alcoa construction site in Portland. "Those two years gave me a special bond with Portland, which continues to this day." Alcoa is now a long-standing client of Sharp Airlines while Hamilton and Portland remain the hub of Sharp Airlines' enterprise.

Malcolm Sharp worked as a commercial pilot flying mainly in south-eastern Australia before founding Sharp Airlines in 1990. "I wanted to provide an efficient, accessible transport solution for western and south-western Victoria", he said. Seventeen years later, he has logged in excess of 100,000km in the cockpit and has carried more than 100,000 passengers.

Mr Sharp reflected on his 17 years of managing his own aviation company. "Like all businesses, we've had to meet challenges. We've had to deal with the national fuel contamination scare of 1990, the impact of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the aviation industry, and the current volatility of world oil prices".

"So regional aviation demands that we be creative. As a result, we listen to customers, monitor local and national economic trends, identify new needs. We invest heavily in training and development, especially when it comes to safety. We understand the corporate, tourist, industry and commuter markets. Most importantly, we remain totally committed to regional aviation and south-west Victoria."

Sharp Airlines' confidence in regional aviation and the south-west is shown by its recent \$2million purchase and refurbishment of two 19-seat Fairchild Metroliners, its state-of-the-art on-line booking service, the 44 flights a week it provides to, from and within south-west Victoria, and the 20,000km its expects to fly next year.

Sharp Airlines' clients include Alcoa Worldwide Alumina, Iluka, Roche Mining, Inco Shipping, Farstad Shipping, Swire Pacific Shipping, Federal and State Government agencies and departments, and parliamentary representatives.

"17 years experience has taught us to be totally client-focussed", said Mr Sharp. "Our operational goal is to offer competitive air services at competitive prices. Our operational commitment is to service quality, air safety and customer satisfaction".

In 2005 Sharp Airlines was awarded both Business of the Year and Service Business of the Year at the Powercor Ace Radio Southern Grampians Business Achievements Awards.

Seventeen years in the competitive world of aviation is testament to the vision, energy and sheer hard work of Malcolm Sharp and the personnel of Sharp Airlines. "I blame it all on Neil Armstrong", said Malcolm Sharp as he takes off for the next decade of this unique Australian aviation story.

And the most unusual cargo Mr Sharp has ever carried? "There was once a box of live snakes. We stored it —very carefully — in the wing locker . . . and then flew very fast!"

For further information visit the Sharp Airlines Website at www.sharpairlines.com.au

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