

# The UK's Catalina

**P**AUL WARREN WILSON launched the Catalina Group in 2003, with the acquisition of Consolidated PBV-5A Catalina C-FNJJ from Canada. Paul had already logged over 1,000 hours on a Catalina, having been a joint-owner of Killer Cat, the flying boat which graced European airshows for over fourteen years until sinking in Southampton Water in 1998.

That Catalina operation had been launched by John Watts, Arthur Gibson and Paul Warren Wilson. They brought G-BLSC, later VP-BPS, to the UK in 1984. It was operated by Plane Sailing Limited and supported by the Catalina Society. Among its adventures were landing on the Thames and taxiing under Tower Bridge, touring the Italian coast advertising Peroni beer, and making a 20,000-mile filming expedition around South America.

The new Catalina operation is run on a membership basis, allowing many more people much greater access, including an opportunity to fly this piece of aviation history on just a PPL!

When Paul acquired the aircraft—since re-registered G-PBYA—a great deal of conversion work had been done for a planned tourist operation in Zimbabwe. This included the removal of water-bombing equipment and the fitting of seating. Hydraulically-operated, single-piece blisters had been added to give passengers a panoramic view. To improve access, a

## Nine lives

G-PBYA WAS ORDERED by the Royal Canadian Air Force as a Canso A amphibian. It was built by Canadian Vickers at Cartierville (construction number CV-283) before being taken on charge in October 1943 as 11005.

It saw service with 9 Squadron at Bella Bella on the British Columbia coast. When the threat of Japanese invasion of Western Canada receded, 9 Squadron was disbanded. The aircraft were flown to Alliford Bay in the Queen Charlotte Islands and joined 7 Squadron in an anti-submarine role.

With the war over, 7 Squadron was disbanded. Our Cat was flown to Moose Jaw where it was later converted to a freighter. It subsequently flew with 413 Survey (Transport) Squadron out of Rockcliffe, Ontario, and later with 121 (Search & Rescue) Flight at Sea Island, Vancouver, before being struck off charge in May 1961 and stored at Vulcan, Alberta. It was sold to Frontier Air Transport, Calgary. 11005 was about to embark on a lengthy civilian career.

11005 was one of five Canso A aircraft acquired for conversion to a water bomber. It was registered as CF-NJF prior to its ferry flight to Calgary and was converted to carry internal tanks by Field Aviation before entering service with Kentings, a well-known

Catalina and Canso operator. It was also chartered to the French operator Protection Civile and flew a number of firefighting seasons with them during the sixties. It was based at Marseille, where it was known by the callsign Pelican Bleu. Initially registered F-ZBAY, it also flew as F-ZBBB, although it reverted to its Canadian markings when returning to Canada.

In 1974, it joined Norcanair, a firefighting company based at Prince Albert in Saskatchewan. Soon after, the registration was changed to C-FNJJ in accordance with new Canadian regulations. In 1980, it was acquired by the Province of Saskatchewan at La Ronde as part of the water-bombing fleet. It was here the aircraft acquired the overall yellow colour scheme.

By the late nineties, all three Saskatchewan Cantos had been disposed of and two of them—including C-FNJJ—were acquired by Hicks and Lawrence and stored at St Thomas, Ontario. Later, they were ferried to Nanaimo on Vancouver Island where Catalina Aero Services planned to convert them into a passenger-carrying configuration for a tourist operation in Zimbabwe. This operation failed to materialise, and in 2003, C-FNJJ was acquired by Paul Warren Wilson.



hydraulically-operated air stair had been added to the rear fuselage. When advertised for sale, the Cat had 12,829 hours on the airframe.

G-PBYA is not just about airshow flying. It provides excellent flying opportunities for the twenty shareholding members of the Catalina Group. An initial investment of £17,500 and monthly contributions of £150 ensure that future operations of the Catalina are secure. (Membership is not recommended as an opportunity to realise capital growth, nor should it be viewed as a long-term investment.)

What's in it for the members? First, they can fly to and from airshows and events, when space permits. Second, all members have an annual allowance of flying the Catalina 'at cost' which means £600 per hour for the first three hours. Pilot members can use all or some of this time to train and qualify on the Cat, after which they can pilot the aircraft to and from airshows and events.

Members may also pool their annual hours and use them on one of the organised annual tours—maybe just a few days, or even weeks away with the aircraft.

Members who have qualified as pilot on the Catalina will be eligible to fly as a pilot member of the crew when the Catalina is operating for air displays and other events.

With respect to aircrew licensing, air displays are normally deemed to be private flights, so they may be flown with just a PPL.

To meet the Catalina Group experience requirements, and subject to CAA approval, captains on the aircraft must hold a BCPL with 1,000 hours flight time, of which 100 hours must be multi-engine. For co-pilots, just a PPL with 100 hours flight time (of which ten hours should be multi-engine) will suffice to be cleared on type.

At the time of writing, two of the twenty shares were available. Details at: [www.catalinabookings.org](http://www.catalinabookings.org)

## Delivering a Cat

KEITH SISSONS WAS responsible for planning the delivery flight of G-PBYA to Duxford and captained the aircraft during its test flying at Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, during December 2003.

Gary Short and Rod Brooking flew out to start the engineering preparation, and co-pilot Mac McKinney joined them to complete the crew. The departure date was 1 March 2004.

The initial route was south, into warmer weather, and an opportunity to prove the engines. Keith says, "The daily routine was governed by serviceability, because the Catalina had been standing in the open in all

weather for over six years." In fact, the ferry flight back to the UK was delayed. On reaching Newfoundland, the forecast tailwind had switched to a twenty-knot headwind, and Keith and Mac had to abandon ship due to commitments back home.

Paul Wilson joined Rod and Gary at St John's and the Catalina restarted its trip on 29 March. On the first leg, the air temperature, inside as well as outside, was -28°C. Flight time across the Atlantic was 12 hr 45 min. The final leg was on the thirtieth, the Catalina setting down at Duxford in front of a large audience. The aircraft's first scheduled air display was in May.

## Cat news

Irish businessman Christy Keane is reported to have purchased the Catalina that sank in Southampton Water and ultimately plans to base the aircraft in Ireland. The former long-term resident of North Weald, Catalina N285RA, which left for new owners in Israel in May 2004, has got no further than Beauvais. It suffered wind damage while awaiting a replacement engine.—Peter R March.

## Specification

NZ 4017 Consolidated 28-5 ACF (civilianised PBV-5A) Catalina

Dimensions	
Wingspan	104 ft
Wing area	1,400 sq ft
Length	63 ft 10 in
Height	20 ft 2 in

Weights & loadings	
Equipped, empty	20,910 lb
Mtow	28,000 lb
Wartime overload weight	35,420 lb
Fuel, standard	6,600 l
Max wing loading	20 lb/sq ft
Max power loading	11.67 lb/hp
g limits	+3.0/-1.5g

Performance	
Sea level Vne	173 kt
Max speed, s/l	155 kt
Cruise	110 kt
Long-range cruise	93 kt
Stall, floats retracted	62 kt
Take-off run	1,000 m
Landing run	1,300 m
Climb	850 fpm
Service ceiling	14,000 ft
Max range, 45 min reserve	2,500+ nm
Endurance, 45 min reserve	27 hours

## Engines & propellers

Two fourteen-cylinder, air-cooled, double-row radial Pratt & Whitney R-1830-92 Twin Wasps, producing 1,200 hp at 48 inches and 2,700 rpm. TBO: 1,200 hr. *Propellers:* 12 ft 1 in diameter, 3-bladed, aluminium, fully-feathering Hamilton Standard constant-speed propellers.

## Manufacturer

The Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, New Orleans, USA, from 1935 to 1945.

## Operator

The Catalina Club of New Zealand Inc, PO Box 72-527, Papakura, New Zealand. Tel: 00 64 9 534 4583. Web: [www.catalina.org.nz](http://www.catalina.org.nz)