

Sights and Sounds of Avalon

WORDS AND PICS BRIAN HARTIGAN

Biggest and Best

The Australian International Airshow at Avalon south of Melbourne served up the sights and especially the sounds of another great air show in March.

Mother nature was much kinder than last time too, with the warm sunshine and relatively kind winds having much to do with what turned out to be record crowds.

Airshow CEO Ian Honnery said the weekend public attendances were particularly pleasing, with numbers up by more than 30 per cent compared to the Saturday and Sunday public day sessions in 2009.

"Total attendances across the full six trade and public days of the event were almost 195,000," Mr Honnery said.

"Good weather, a fantastic lineup of aircraft on static display and in the flying program, along with all the celebrations associated with the RAAF's 90th anniversary has contributed to an outstanding event."

From its fledgling beginning at Avalon Airport in 1992, the Australian International Airshow and Aerospace & Defence Exposition has grown to become a world-class event on the aviation and aerospace calendar.

"We would not have been able to build this event without the continuing support of the Government of Victoria, the City of Geelong and the Australian Defence Force, in particular the Royal Australian Air Force," Mr Honnery said.

The 2011 Australian International Airshow was particularly special because it celebrated the 90th anniversary of the Royal Australian Air Force as well as the 100th anniversary of paid passenger flight in Australia.

Aircraft from around the world descended on Avalon to thrill crowds across the week.

BOne, Hornets, Super Hornets, Fighting Falcons, Hawks and even Raptors were on hand – with the latter's static-only display a major disappointment for just about everybody.

But, in the air, there was plenty to get excited about.

My favourite this year was the C27J Spartan, making a welcome return after a four-year absence. And, yes, the 27-tonne transport plane did its usual barrel roll and loop tricks – but with the added WOW of a fair-dinkum, full-length knife-edge pass! Unbelievable! But true.

However, for a couple of reasons, my focus was more on the ground than in the air this time around – so here are a few things I observed...



BUSHMASTER UTE

Thales' Bushmaster family of vehicles now has a uniquely Australian addition to its range – a true blue Aussie ute, born and built in Bendigo.

With a 5-tonne payload capacity and sharing the same blast-protected DNA as the battle-proven Bushmaster, the ute is as capable as it is safe for the operator.

Bushmaster is a mine-protected vehicle that provides a high degree of protection against mines and IEDs, using a v-hull monocoque to deflect the blast away from the vehicle and its occupants, and the vehicle's overall armour providing protection against small arms of up to 7.62mm.

Protection levels can be further increased by adding armour upgrade kits.

With more than 800 Bushmasters either in service or on order with the Australian, Dutch, UK and US Defence forces, and with numerous survivors attesting to the survivability of the design, the Bushmaster ute adds considerable weight to Thales' designs on certain elements of Project LAND 121.

