

Yeti-FAN returns to the third dimension

The Yeti Flies Again – in Switzerland!

The legendary Pilatus Porter of the 1960 Dhaulagiri expedition is, once again, airborne. Or at least a replica: it bears the authentic colors of the original Yeti, and, like the original, it is powered by a piston engine but is a different Porter. On January 14, it took off from Bleienbach for its second maiden flight. Even though it's not the original, the new Yeti once played a key role in the Porter development.

It was freezing cold on that Friday morning, minus 2° Celsius, as the Yeti rolled towards runway 05 of the airfield in Langenthal-Bleienbach with Roland Luscher and Marc Daetwyler at the controls. At 11:48 a.m., the yellow/pink Porter lifted-off. The observers on the ground followed its journey from its start until the machine disappeared on the horizon. Despite the cold temperatures, they eagerly awaited the return of the plane, which, an hour later, performed a textbook landing. Years of work (6180 hours to be exact) were rewarded with a perfect second maiden flight of the 60-year-old Yeti.

The Yeti Porter? Hasn't she been lying wrecked in the Himalayan mountains for 62 years? Actually, the remnants of the Yeti have been in the Nepalese high mountains since its accident on May 5, 1960. It was the first prototype HB-FAN of the legendary Pilatus PC-6 Porter, which was used in 1960 by the Dhaulagiri Expedition as transport support, and, for this purpose, adorned the strikingly yellow/pink paint scheme. In 2016, however, the Yeti was displayed in the Transport Museum in Lucerne. How so? Well, it's not the original! This specific aircraft is three years younger with (MSN) 540 as the construction number and HB-FAL as the original registration.

To America and back

This aircraft said goodbye to Switzerland 57 years ago and mainly flew in Canada and in the US. From 2002 until today, the plane has been registered as N283SW.

After a lengthy career in Alaska, the Porter suffered engine failure. Philipp Sturm, Swiss pilot on site, had the idea to bring the plane back to Switzerland with a Lycoming IO 540 A1 piston engine and to resurrect it as the Yeti. He repainted the airplane accordingly and exhibited it, still with a defective engine, at the AERO in Friedrichshafen in April 2016. On October 6, 2016, the Porter was loaned to the Swiss Transport Museum in Lucerne. Eventually, Beat Roos, Daniel Geissmann (VHS,) and Peter Daetwyler bought the plane and founded Yetiflyers GmbH with the mission to make the Yeti fly again.

They spared neither money nor efforts to achieve their goal. "After all, it is probably the best documented Pilatus Porter around," said Peter Daetwyler. With the help of numerous supporters, the goal was finally achieved, and now, the Yeti flies again! Only a few observers who watched the colored bird fly in Bleienbach were probably aware that, although it is not the original Yeti, it is still a Pilatus Porter with an incredibly special story of its own.

HB-FAL - the first seaplane Pilatus Porter

Already in its conception phase, it was clear to its designer Henry Fierz that the Pilatus Porter was intended for use on snow and ice. But was it also suitable as a seaplane? Only one way to find out. In 1962, the Porter MSN 540 was under construction at Pilatus Flugzeugwerke. On April 3, test pilot Rolf Bohm took the first flight and completed the test program.

A week later, on April 10, the plane was on its way north; only having been registered in the aircraft registry as HB-FAL the day before. The destination of the flight was Linköping, Sweden, the location of the Saab plant. Contrary to the Swiss, the Swedes had experience with modern seaplanes. So, they were tasked with putting this Porter on floats.

After a few weeks, the Porter added seaplane to its qualifications. On May 29th, Rolf Boehm, alongside a mechanic and Henry Fierz, flew back to Linköping in a different Porter to take delivery of the new seaplane.

In the following months, Saab, together with former Navy pilot Bob Bjoernekul, carried out additional test flights and demos on the water in Sweden before the Porter was converted back to a land plane and, subsequently, it returned to Switzerland on January 14, 1963.

After a stopover in Kloten (as a foreigner Bob Bjoernekul was not allowed to land at the military airfield in Buochs), the HB-FAL arrived home.

Pilatus put the Porter back on floats and it was placed on water between Buochs and Ennetburgen on November 14, 1963. Further test and demo flights were carried on Lake Lucerne. After that, the Porter was, once again, converted to a land plane. In 1965, the Porter left Switzerland for Canada and the registration HB-FAL was dropped.

Dealing with bureaucracy: As long as the Yeti-Porter remained on the ground, having the original registration HB-FAN from the original Yeti did not bother anyone. Only once it was clear that the new Yeti should be flown, it turned into an issue. Since the plane is still registered in the US as N283SW, officials got involved. The “HB” had to go. Luckily, the original letter combination of the registering office 60 years ago proved to be ideal. With a swift action of a paintbrush, the official HB-FAN turned into the ever so fitting “Yeti-FAN”.



Yeti in the third dimension



Peter Daetwyler (left) and Beat Roos are the driving forces behind the Yeti-Flyer project.



Extensive instrumentation with the newest technology cockpit



HB-FAL – today's Yeti N283SW in 1962 during its first test on floats in Sweden.



A cold but clear January day at the Langenthal-Bleienbach flights airport – perfect conditions for a photo session