



On January 21, the Yeti Porter performed an instrument approach in Bern-Belp Airport during one of its first flights after its completed overhaul.

A chapter of Swiss aviation history comes to life in Langenthal

"Yeti-Porter" flies again

The "Porter" is still the most famous Pilatus aircraft. With the complete overhaul of the "Yeti" PC-6 Porter - it took approximately two years - Swiss aviation history will be written in Langenthal in 2022, while in Stans, after 63 years and around 600 units built, Porter production will end in the middle of the year.

On May 4, 1959, Rolf Boehm made the maiden flight with the prototype of the Pilatus PC-6/340 Porter HB-FAN, S/N 337. A 340 hp Lycoming GSO 480-B1A6 six-cylinder boxer engine served as the power plant. Two years earlier in Stans, with the project "Pilatus Commercial No. 6"(PC-6), Henry Fierz, the technical manager at Pilatus Flugzeugwerke, named it "Porter". Shortly after the maiden flight, the Swiss aircraft manufacturer presented its latest creation at the "Aerosalon" in Paris and caused quite a stir. On March 12, 1960, the Porter prototype HB-FAN started its long journey to Nepal to support the Swiss Dhaulagiri expedition in the Himalayas. At that time, no one would have guessed that this robust STOL aircraft would remain in production for 63 years.

A Piston Porter returns home

The huge Swiss Porter fanbase was overjoyed when in 2015 the entrepreneur and pilot Philipp Sturm brought the PC-6/350H2, registered as N283SW, one of the last airworthy piston engine Porters, back to Switzerland from Alaska after an engine failure. However, this Porter is the original HB-FAL (serial number 540) which made its maiden flight on April 9, 1962 - exactly 60 years ago.



At the AERO 2016 in Friedrichshafen, the "Yeti Porter", which belonged to Philipp Sturm at the time, was one of the eye-catchers.

As a PC-6/350, this Porter was one of only six examples to have the more powerful Lycoming IGO540-A1A piston engine, which had 350 hp at 3400 RPM. Soon, floats were installed, and test flights were carried out in Switzerland (Lake Lucerne) and in Sweden, and later, also in Canada as a factory demonstrator. After a brief stint with Fairchild (then licensee of the Porter), it flew primarily humanitarian missions in Canada, mainly on floats. In the 1970s, it was modified to the H2 version, and was thus approved for an increased take-off weight by around 180 kg.

Until its return to Switzerland, the Porter was in commercial use with McCarty Air in Alaska. But Philipp Sturm wanted to revive her as the Yeti Porter in Switzerland and painted it pink and yellow according to original Pilatus documents and adorned with the original registration HB-FAN. It was the eye-catcher at the AERO 2016 in Friedrichshafen. Philipp Sturm used it to advertise his FlyAlaska GmbH, where he teaches guests how to "fly off-airport" (see also SkyNews.ch 04/2016). The PC-6 was then put up for sale, but interest was initially limited. Only the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne was interested in the "Yeti-Porter" as a loan, which, from 2016 onwards, resulted in three years on display in its aerospace hall.



Until 2015, the N283SW flew as one of the last piston Porters at McCarty Air in Alaska, transporting cargo and passengers.

"It must fly again"

Enter entrepreneur and passionate pilot Peter Daetwyler and former Aston Martin whisperer Beat Roos. Both are members of the Antique Airplane Association of Switzerland. Beat Roos wanted to exhibit the Porter in a planned transport museum near Bern. But the good condition of the old-timer made them come to the conclusion that this aircraft had to fly again especially since it is the only remaining airworthy Piston Porter. They quickly struck a deal with Philipp Sturm, bought the PC-6, and founded Yetiflyers GmbH, based at the Bleienbach airfield. Also, on board was Daniel Geissmann, the person responsible for the collection and a member of the executive board of the Swiss Museum of Transportation.

"And when we do something, we do it as perfectly as possible," said Beat Roos, who has earned an excellent reputation as an Aston Martin & Lagonda restorer in the international car scene.

For Beat Roos, among other things, heart and soul matter. As a young mechanic, he worked for Pilatus in the 1960s and was involved in the assembly of the Mirage IIS/RS and in the design of the Porter. After that, and up until the mid-1970s, he worked for the South African aviation authority near Pretoria and flew with a Beech Musketeer HB-ENM from Bern to Johannesburg. He then switched to the automotive industry and made a name for himself as Aston Martin 'whisperer'. His company Roos Engineering Ltd. has restored Aston Martins for customers all over the world throughout the decades, and, among other things, built the legendary Aston Martin & Lagonda Shooting Brake in Switzerland. Among them was the original DB5 from the James Bond film «Goldfinger». In 2011, Beat Roos sold his company to Walter Frey Holding and withdrew from active business to have more time for projects such as the "Yeti".

Very competent team

On November 18, 2019, the "Yeti" Porter left the Swiss Museum of Transportation, and, dismantled, made its way to Peter Daetwyler's Hall 18 at the Langenthal-Bleienbach airport. He provided the excellent infrastructure that was predestined for the reconstruction of the Porter, which had found its new home.



From 2016 to 2019, "Yeti" and the "Yeti Porter" delighted visitors to the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne.

Thus, a skilled and qualified team was formed in Bleienbach with project manager Beat Roos, and motivator Peter Daetwyler, including former Pilatus employees who took on the task of restoring the PC-6: Pius Kung was an expert and Porter mechanic at Pilatus for many years, Fritz Kuert, Norbert Karrer, Seppi Barmettler and Markus Dallenbach; all from the Pilatus Works. Eric Boegli, Christian Nyffeler, and Markus Kaser were the Daetwyler AG experts. Rita and Heinz Buhlmann, the saddler team from Bern, Geri Staude, the aircraft specialist and original contractor, as well as many other suppliers and advisors provided support. Of course, Pilatus Flugzeugwerke AG also contributed an indispensable part. "Our goal was to get the Yeti Porter airborne in the two years we were aiming for," said Beat Roos. And they did.

The team totally restored the PC-6 in around 6200 hours. Every screw, every control cable is new, as are the propeller and all blades. All lights were converted to LED. Specific parts were made from scratch, such as an end piece for the exhaust system. The brakes were modified from the original version: from the single-piston caliper to the homologated two-piston caliper. The Yeti flyers deliberately did without the Beringer brakes for originality. Several thousand new parts in total were installed. The lettering was applied according to the existing original documents, helping the plane look like the original "Yeti", which rests dormant in the Himalayas.

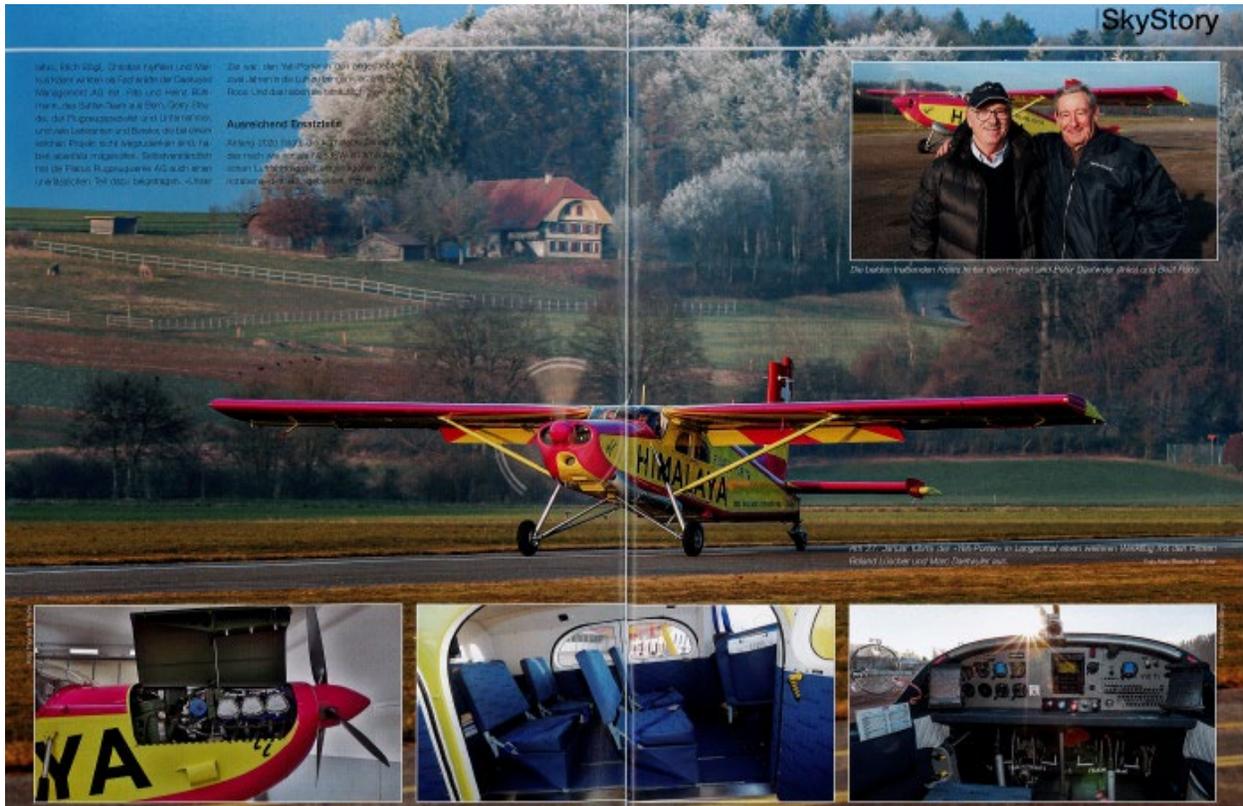


Part of the team that got the "Yeti-Porter" back in the air (from left) Marc Daetwyler, Fritz Kuert, Beat Roos, Roland Lüscher and Peter Daetwyler.

Rare piston engine

So far, the "rebirth" of the "Yeti-Porter" has emptied a few piggy banks. But Peter Daetwyler and Beat Roos are convinced that this investment in Swiss aviation history is still worthwhile. They are, however, a bit worried about the Lycoming IOGO-540-A1A piston engine, since it is now extremely rare. It also powers the Aero Commander 500F, but only a handful of those are still flying. But their friend George, an accomplished engine rebuilder in the US, has offered the Yetiflyers a second engine. The Yeti flyers are confident that chances are low that the plane will disappear into the museum again.

The interior of the Yeti was designed by Beat Roos. Of course, the original noble Pilatus fabric from Lantal Textiles AG in Langenthal was used including the carpet. In addition, the cabin is very well insulated from noise, which is not common in a working Porter. Passengers can easily fly without ear protection. In the cabin, there are only four passenger seats instead of seven, allowing all passengers enough legroom. The cockpit is also well equipped, with a Garmin 275 in the center supporting the pilots. Likewise, Garmin digital engine gauges help ensure the longevity of the power plant. Instrument flights are also possible with this PC-6, built-in dual controls are there to support.



Trouble free maiden flight

On Friday, January 14, 2022, at 11:48 a.m., the time had come: The new, yet 60-year-old “Yeti-Porter” N283SW, took off from Langenthal-Bleienbach’s runway 05 for its maiden flight. But instead of landing after a short stint to fix any defects, the factory flight lasted a good hour. “It pulled slightly to the left, and Pius Kung then corrected that with a 2.5 turn on the aileron rod, otherwise it flew perfectly,” summarized Beat Roos - after consultation with the pilots.

The test flights with the «frame-off» revised piston Porter were carried out by Roland Luscher and Marc Daetwyler. With over 2000 flight hours on a Pilatus PC-6 Turbo Porter and a total of 12,000 flight hours of experience, it is an honor for Roland Luscher to also fly the Piston Porter. He is the airport manager at Reichenbach airport and an experienced skydiving pilot on PC-6s and Cessna Caravans of Scenic Air. Marc Daetwyler, one of Peter Daetwyler's sons, is a commercial pilot with EasyJet Switzerland and can look back on more than 7000 flight hours.

More direct than a Turbo Porter

First, numerous ground tests were conducted to determine whether the engine achieved the desired parameters. The first flight was also about checking all the systems and monitoring the engine. "As the flight time increased, we gained more and more confidence in the motor - it runs amazingly well. We also tested the avionics and then conducted an instrument flight to Bern. The mechanics did a fantastic job, it's a real pleasure to fly this Porter," said Roland Luscher. Compared to the Turbo Porter, the power output is around 200 hp lower, but the Piston Porter is "more direct" when it comes to power changes, according to Roland Luescher. As a Beaver pilot in Canada, however, he knows how to handle piston engines very well. It is a great fortune to be able to fly this Piston Porter, an absolute honor and pleasure.

The «Yeti»-Porter is said to be the only piston version in the world to be admired at several flight events this year. In Switzerland, this is likely to happen at the Pilatus fly-in on May 8th in Lausanne and at the "OldtimAIR Flugparade" on July 9th at the Stanserhorn. And who knows, maybe the historic Porter will find its way back into the Swiss aviation register.

Another porter for the Swiss Museum of Transport

Another Pilatus Porter is currently being built at Yetiflyers GmbH in Bleienbach, which will eventually be exhibited at the Swiss Museum of Transport (VHS) in Lucerne. However, this is a PC-6/82-H2 Turbo-Porter built in 1977 (c/n 778), which last flew as an S5-CEI before being decommissioned in May 2017 at the Skydive Toscana in Gecina. Its tiger paint job, which it had gotten in 1996, is striking. In cooperation with Pilatus Flugzeugwerke AG and the Swiss Museum of Transport, the machine is now to be handed over to the Swiss Museum of Transport by the Yetiflyers in a new paint job in May of this year.



The "Tiger Porter" is being refurbished as an exhibit in Bleienbach.