

## VICKERS 610 VIKING 1B G-AIVG



### PETER F PEYER details the meticulous work undertaken by a small group of enthusiasts at Basel to restore a former BEA Viking to static display condition

More than fifteen years have passed since the Musée Nationale d'Automobiles Collection Schlumpf in Mulhouse transferred the former BEA Vickers 610 Viking 1B G-AIVG (c/n 220) to the bi-national airport of Basel-Mulhouse, commonly known as EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg. Its restoration has taken much longer than expected, but it is hoped that work will be completed by 2021. Moreover, talks have taken place with the airport authorities to ensure that a suitable place is found within the confines of the airport for permanent static display.

A team of around six enthusiasts have toiled in all types of weather conditions to bring back this rare survivor of the early post-war era, and today the aircraft is resplendent in the livery of Balair, Switzerland's first real charter company founded in the early fifties. Two series 610 Vikings – HB-AAN (c/n 217) and HB-AAR (c/n 219) – were acquired from LTU in 1957, and they formed the backbone of the airline's short haul division until sold to Air Ferry early in 1963.

Shortly after the automobile museum handed over the Viking in 2004, a group of local enthusiasts formed an association named 'Vintage Aircraft Club' to raise money for the restoration and to form a legal entity to start work on the aircraft. A disused car park of Swiss International Airways has been the restoration site, and the airport authorities have permitted the 'Vikings' to use this spot on very favourable terms. Although only accessible from the Swiss sector, the site has proved to be well situated, but developments at EuroAirport dictate that the aircraft will have to be moved to a new, possibly permanent exhibition location. While the fuselage, wings and parts of the tailplane still remain separate, considerable progress has been made on all the components. Compared to the heap of scrap metal that was delivered from Mulhouse in June 2004, the recently painted fuselage only gives a vague impression of the amount of work that has gone in to this project.

*Recent progress with the restoration of the former BEA Viking has been excellent, and here the aircraft is seen on October 13 2018 following the application of basic Balair livery, although the aircraft never flew for the famous Swiss charter company.*



An early important task that took place between 2004 and 2008 was to clean the fuselage, wings, engines and tailplane from corrosion, rust and dust that had accumulated over decades of neglect, as a result of storage in a shed with a leaking roof. To prevent further deterioration, these parts were treated with a coat of primer. A completely new floor had to be laid, and the windows were removed and replaced by plastic windows in order to repair the original items. Insulation and making the hull waterproof further engaged the restoration crew until around 2008. It should be appreciated that all work up to this time had been done on a freelance basis, mostly by retired mechanics, but also people of other trades. The team could, however, rely on the professional knowhow and expertise of aircraft engineer Wolfgang Neumann, whose retirement from work in 2008 allowed the restoration work to take a great leap forward. To this day, the Viking belongs to an association named Experimental Aircraft Association Alsace, represented by Wolfgang Neumann and André Goepfert, who signed a contract with the museum in Mulhouse agreeing to the Viking being restored for permanent display. Another condition stated that under no circumstances should the aircraft be exported from France, as it is considered to be an historic monument of national importance, despite it being of British origin and never having been registered in France.

One rainy day in November 2014 a crane was hired to attach the tailplane to the fuselage. However, a violent storm the following

**HEADING PHOTOGRAPH:** Balair's Vickers Viking fleet, comprising HB-AAN (c/n 217) and HB-AAR (c/n 219), which flew with the airline between 1957 and 1963 and were regular visitors to numerous European and Mediterranean airports. They were identical to the Viking undergoing restoration with the Vintage Aircraft Club at Basel.

*Retired aircraft engineer Wolfgang Neumann has carried out much of the recent work on the Viking, and his expertise has proved invaluable in keeping the project on course for completion in the next twelve months.*

*(All photographs via Rolf Keller)*







*Recent view of the restoration scene as the Viking continues to take shape in the hands of a dedicated group of enthusiasts led by Balz Buser (president) and Wolfgang Neumann (chief engineer), and including Christian Hartmann, Dieter Buser, Roger Frossard and Walter Schweizer.*

spring almost tore the unit off again, and the rudder was swung from one side to the other by the strong winds. Due to the damage, the rudder had to be locked in the neutral position. Later, the original galley was re-installed in order that the thirsty and hungry volunteers could be catered for in the homely cabin of the Viking. A coffee machine and sink have also been installed, although water still has to be carried to the aircraft. Many times, the annual general meeting of the members of the 'Vintage Aircraft Club' – or shortly 'The Viking Club' – has taken place inside the aircraft with two large tables and a couple of benches accommodating up to a dozen people. Former Crossair MD80 and Avro RJ leather seats also sit alongside the side of the cabin.

One remarkable task undertaken by Wolfgang Neumann during a winter was the restoration of the cockpit to near original state by cleaning and reassembling all the vital instruments, while also refurbishing the pilots' seats and even the swivel chair of the radio operator. The ADF antennae, complete with their familiar stream-lined housings, have also been put back in place.

Survival of the Viking was due in part to the decision by British European Airways not to repair G-AIVG after it suffered damage during an aborted take-off at Le Bourget Airport, Paris, on August 12 1953. Luckily, there were no casualties in the accident, but the left main gear was torn off, and the aircraft was abandoned in France and subsequently acquired by the Schlumpf Collection. Lack of the two main gears made it necessary to search for replacement units. With the help of a former Viking Club member, who set off to trace likely candidates in England, suitable undercarriage units were found. One complete leg with a wheel was found at the Norfolk & Suffolk Aviation Museum at Flixton, while another was located in the North East Air Museum in Sunderland. Both legs were remains from a Vickers Valetta (VX577), that had been an exhibit at the North East Air Museum until it had been almost completely destroyed in an arson attack in the early nineties. Thanks to the generosity of the museum, G-AIVG will now be supported on genuine undercarriage legs. Both gears have been cleaned, reassembled and painted, and now look as if they are new. The complete assembly of the fuselage, wings, undercarriage and engine nacelles will take place once a site for permanent exhibition has been chosen.

It was a big surprise to everybody when about four years ago it was discovered that one wing apparently did not originate from G-AIVG. While carrying out some cleaning and rubbing down of the port wing, another registration surfaced, and G-AJBR emerged. G-AJBR (c/n 243) itself was damaged when an engine failed taking off from a wet runway at Northolt on January 9 1952. Although it seems possible that the wing was acquired when 'BR was scrapped at Luton by Autair in 1964, it is also possible that a wing swap took place after the Le Bourget accident. As the automobile museum in Mulhouse had plans to restore the Viking for permanent display amidst its world-famous car exposition, and place it on a pylon with a spiral staircase giving access to the cabin, a large circular hole was cut into the underside of the aft fuselage. This has now been covered by some new sheet metal.

In a similar manner, very simple ironwork had been placed within the empty engine nacelles, primarily to support the propellers, and also heavy enough to keep the aircraft balanced. However, the origin of

the propellers remains a mystery. From the inclination of the blades it becomes apparent that they were turning anti-clockwise, whereas it is commonly believed that the Bristol Hercules engines turned clockwise. As it seems unlikely, therefore, that the propellers are not original, it is possible that they came from either a Nord Noratlas or a Bristol Freighter.

Other minor tasks are yet to be completed before final assembly can take place. And, last but not least, the whole aircraft will need a new coat of paint before being shown to the public. Too many years in the open and exposure to the weather have taken their toll on the old lady. The following is a summary of the major work undertaken in 2019 that has brought the Viking one step forward to its final state:-

- Refurbishment of the two-tone cheat line below the windows
- Placement of ADF loop-antennae housings on top of fuselage
- Reconstruction of window frames lost after dismantling of the original windows for cleaning.
- Complete revision of main passenger door including locking system
- Application of registration HB-AAR
- Cleaning and painting the propellers
- Completion of sheet metal repair to underside of fuselage



*Wolfgang Neumann's hard work has recreated the cockpit of the Viking to include much of the early style equipment.*

A decision by the airport authorities about a suitable permanent site for the Viking is imminently awaited by the 'Vikings'. It is hoped that some form of roof will be erected to protect this rare aircraft from the ravages of the natural elements. A much desired solution would be the old Balair hangar (built from steel and wood) that was constructed on Basel's first airfield at Sternenfeld' in the mid-twenties, and later moved to Mulhouse. This would not only be the ideal home for the Viking, but also a museum portraying the rich history of aviation in the 'Dreiland', consisting of France, Germany and Switzerland.

For more information, please visit [www.save-a-viking.org](http://www.save-a-viking.org) or [www.vintage-aircraft-club.org](http://www.vintage-aircraft-club.org). Anyone with further previously undisclosed information regarding G-AIVG is requested to contact the editor.