



*Air Commodore Owen in normal mode ... and surfer mode.*

# In the downtime – the wild one

By Laird Darren Gallagher

**Motorbikes. There is something about them that just has that essence of cool. With the tough guys like Marlon Brando, the ladies men like Fonzie, and the lawmen like John and Ponch in CHiPs, there are so many ways to enjoy these two wheeled machines.**

**Surfing. Again, a past-time that consumes thousands of Aussies, who are all in pursuit of that perfect wave, and again a sport that captures its own element of cool - or at the very least cool water.**

If you ever wondered what a fast jet guy might do in his spare time, well, in this edition, I have the answer. Sitting high on the hill at RAAF Base Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains I had the opportunity to take a moment with one of the busiest gents up there, Air Commodore Rick "Ricko" Owen. Currently working as the Headquarters Air Command Chief of Staff (noting that Air Command makes up 10000 of the 14000 members of the permanent Air Force), Rick has certainly got his hands full, tackling tasks that encompass areas such as managing Air Command personnel and family welfare issues and initiatives, operational readiness and capability development, and various other corporate governance

requirements. As you can see, his need for downtime is there, and I was on hand to get the inside word.

**Bikes and Surfing! It's hard to know where to start. I have a certain affinity with salt water, so we'll start with the surfing. Tell us about that and how you got involved?**

It was very early on, I was 11 or 12 and my Dad and I went camping at Black Head near Forster on the NSW coast. I started there on a Bill Wallace board, and wish I still had it now. Since then I have surfed as much as I could growing up and moving about with my family. The Air Force has provided me with opportunities to surf around the world in all sorts of places, some you'd expect, like Hawaii and some you wouldn't, like Israel. Surfing gets into your blood, and I hope I can continue to catch a wave for a lot of years to come. It keeps me healthy and in many ways more in touch across the generations of people in the Air Force.

**For those of us who don't know anything about it - what kinds of boards are there, and which types are the most fun?**

*Ah, now the second part of that question always generates a lot of discussion out in the water. For me the answer is easy, any board*

*that you can ride will give you an incredible amount of pleasure, so all of them are fun. The conditions and your experience may dictate the best type of board to use. These days there is a huge range of boards; short boards up to about six foot eight inches; mini-mals around seven to eight foot; and long boards right up to ten or twelve foot, although at that length you might need a boat license to ride it. Construction of a modern board is also pretty diverse, with the traditional fibreglass covered foam slowly being overtaken by the new technologies of computer designed poly-resin type boards. Hey, call me old school, but I like the feel and ride of the traditional fibreglass board.*

**I understand you were behind some kind of ADF surfing initiative. How did that all come about?**

*This was really driven by some great young surfers at Williamstown, who enlisted my help to put together the first ADF surfing championships. It was a small team of young guys who did a huge amount of work and we held the first comp in 2004 at One Mile beach, Nelsons Bay. Since then the competition has been hosted by Navy, Army and Air Force again in rotation. We get about 75 competitors and as you can imagine it is a great few days and an*

