

The DC-3 That's Capturing the World's Attention Heads to Warbirds Over Wanaka

Described as one of the "most iconic and beautifully preserved DC-3s flying today," the New Zealand owned Spirit of Douglas has been confirmed to appear at next Easter's Warbirds Over Wanaka airshow as part of its ambitious Global Tour.

Originally built in 1942 at Douglas Aircraft Company in California for the US Air Force this DC-3 served in the China-Burma-India theatre before later transitioning into civilian roles.

Over the years, it has held a unique place in aviation culture—from starring in the 1994 film *Richie Rich* to appearing at Duxford and Normandy for the 75th and 80th Major D-Day commemorations.

The aircraft was acquired in 2023 by Christchurch businessman Mark Stewart, whose lifelong passion for flying, travel, and adventure led him to this extraordinary piece of aviation history. Stewart says the more he learned about the aircraft and its lineage, the stronger the connection became. He speaks with admiration about Donald Douglas, whose design vision transformed global travel and reshaped the modern aviation landscape.

Mark has described the Spirit of Douglas project as “a chance to honour the endurance, elegance, and spirit of exploration embodied by the DC-3, and to celebrate the remarkable legacy of Donald Douglas.” That passion ultimately inspired the decision to undertake a modern recreation of a round-the-world journey, echoing the pioneering achievements of early Douglas aircraft.

The resulting tour marks several significant milestones:

- 100 years since the first circumnavigation of the globe by a Douglas World Cruiser in 1924
- 90 years since the first flight of the DC-3 in 1935
- A contemporary tribute to one of the most influential aircraft ever built

The Spirit of Douglas Global Tour began in August, with the aircraft departing the United States and making a multi-stop crossing to France before continuing across Europe and beyond. The team behind the aircraft describes the journey as both a flying celebration of aviation history and a living reminder of the extraordinary impact of Douglas aircraft on the world.

Warbirds Over Wanaka General Manager Ed Taylor is rapt having such a wonderful example of the iconic DC-3 coming to New Zealand for the airshow. “The DC-3 is one of the most enduring aircraft types ever built and to be able to celebrate its 90th anniversary year with this particular aircraft is going to be special,” says Ed.

Follow the unfolding journey at www.spiritofdouglas.org

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