

Floating on Air

The story of Harbour Air's fleet

WITH THEIR BRIGHT WHITE bodies and bold yellow and blue stripes, Harbour Air's glowing aircraft are a part of the fabric of life on the West Coast. From log buyers and politicians to Hollywood stars and coastal commuters, these hearty machines have transported people from all over the world in the airline's 25 years of service. They have even had cameos in film and television including *MacGyver*, *Danger Bay* and most recently *Men in Trees*.

Now at 36 planes and counting—17 Beavers, 18 Turbine Single Otters and one Cessna 185 (see sidebar)—Harbour Air's fleet is the cornerstone of their success. Because production of Beavers and Otters ceased in 1965 and 1967 respectively, each plane undoubtedly has an interesting and colourful past. The sturdy C-GOPP, for one, served the Ontario Provincial Police from 1954 to 1992 and joined Harbour Air's fleet in 1999.

Harbour Air began operations with two leased de Havilland Beaver aircraft in 1982. In the first few years, company founders

Greg McDougall and Cliff Oakley flew charters for the forestry industry. When the opportunity arose in 1984 to purchase six single-engine aircraft and the Sea Island floatplane terminal at Vancouver International Airport, Harbour Air went for it and began flying charters to remote B.C. fishing lodges. As they purchased more Beavers and single-

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engine Otters—by 1990 the company was operating 25 aircraft—the company began offering scenic tours and scheduled flights between the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

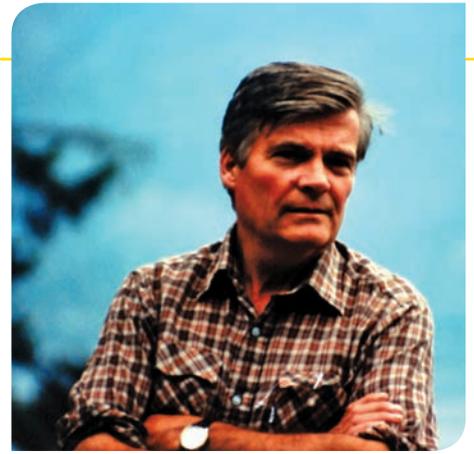
In the early 1990s, concerned about the decreasing reliability of the Otter's original piston engines, the company explored replacing the radial engine with turbine power.

"We came upon our signature aircraft by accident," explains company president Peter Evans, with a chuckle.

Harbour Air's 14-seat Turbine Single Otter was the result of a chance visit in 1991 by retired de Havilland Canada aerodynamicist Dick Hiscocks. As a member of the team that created the Otter, Hiscocks knew airplane construction. When he dropped by Harbour Air's hangar in Richmond, B.C., engineer Bob Bater was working on the company's first Single Otter turbine conversion, prompting Hiscocks to ask Bob how much weight was shed by removing the piston engine.

Harbour Air's gleaming fleet at the Coal Harbour terminal in Vancouver's harbour (John Winter)





Clockwise from top left: leased Twin Otter fleet at Richmond terminal (Doreen Kozak); Harbour Air's chief engineer Bob Bater (Doreen Kozak); flying over Redonda Island, 2005 (Bill Hahn).

"Bob said four hundred to five hundred pounds," says Evans. "Dick suggested that he could increase the passenger capacity by adding double seats, the same as in the Twin Otter, and apply for a gross weight increase."

The ingenious scheme worked and in 1992, Harbour Air certified the aircraft to operate 14 seats and carry a gross weight of 8,367 pounds. The company made a number of other improvements to the aircraft including electrical and cargo modifications, and replacement of the original flat-side windows with panorama versions for better sightseeing views.

"Turbine power is extremely reliable," says Evans.

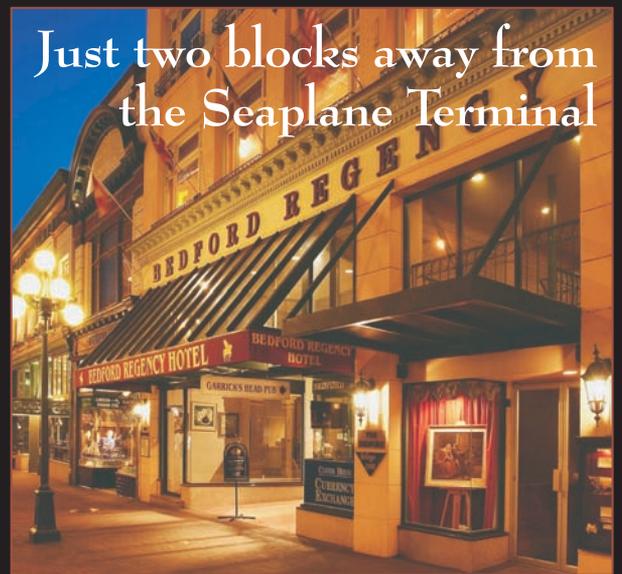
With its increased performance and improved reliability, the Turbine Otter was a visionary aircraft that would carry Harbour Air into the future of aviation. Harbour Air has since sold their conversion components to aircraft companies around the world.

It takes two and a half months and approximately 1.6 million dollars to convert a Turbine Otter to Harbour Air's specifications. The construction of the newest addition to the company's gleaming fleet, Otter number 16, was recently completed.

Countries around the globe, including Greece, Mexico and China, seek Harbour Air's expertise in the seaplane industry. In early 2007, a Turbine Otter was ferried to Malta for Harbour Air Malta's newest service between Malta and Gozo.

Safety first

Every evening the hangars housing Harbour Air's planes bustle with activity. Renowned for the meticulous maintenance of their aircraft,

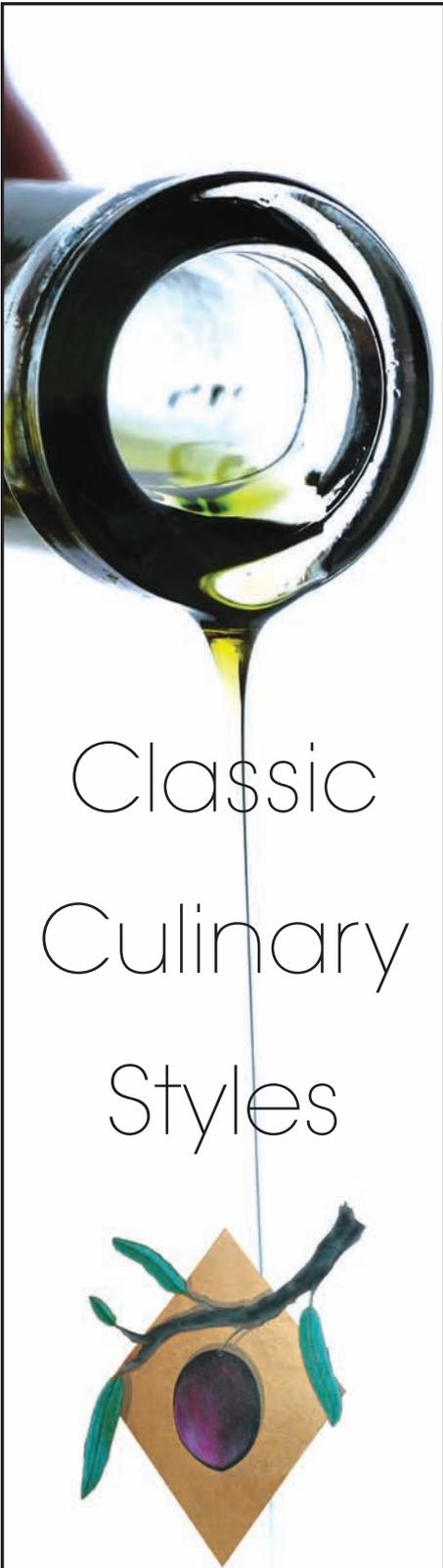


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Harbour Air performs daily and regulation 100-hour inspections. As floatplanes are prohibited from flying at night, all work happens in the evening when the planes are done their daily work.

“Customers like our planes because they are clean and quiet,” says Doug Hamerton, Harbour Air’s Vice-President of Maintenance and Engineering. “Every night, each airplane is looked over, washed and cleaned. We have a rigorous check-ride system, too.”

Hamerton, who has worked for the company since its inception, is referring to the Pilot Proficiency Check (PPC) performed before each plane takes off.

“And we overhaul the planes every four to five years,” he adds. “Take them apart, overhaul, paint, and redo the interior.”

Reliable, safe, quiet, attractive—it’s no wonder the airline’s devoted passengers enjoy



The nose of a Harbour Air Single Otter (John Winter)

the ride so much. With its dedicated staff and commitment to high safety standards, Harbour Air expects to be carrying people across the West Coast for years to come.
—Belinda Bruce 

De Havilland DHC-2 Beaver

Passengers: 5-6

Number in Harbour Air fleet: 14

Aviation experts consider the de Havilland DHC-2 Canada Beaver to be one of the most perfectly designed small utility aircraft ever built. Developed soon after World War II to service operations in the rugged Canadian north and conceived as a “half-ton flying pickup truck”, the Beaver is a reliable, single-engine monoplane capable of setting down on land, water, and snow. The Beaver’s first flight was on August 16, 1947 in Downsview, Ontario. The plane was an immediate success and when production finally ceased in 1965, over 1,600 Beavers had been built.

Adopted worldwide, the Beaver has become the floatplane of choice for island-hopping along the Pacific Northwest, flying into the Arctic, transporting doctors and missionaries into remote spots in Africa, and serving as a support aircraft in Antarctic expeditions.

De Havilland DHC-3 Turbine Single Otter

Passengers: 10-14

Number in Harbour Air fleet: 18

Sometimes referred to as “a big Beaver”, the de Havilland Canada DHC-3 Otter is a single-engine, high wing, propeller-driven aircraft, superior to the Beaver in size, weight,

horsepower, seating and cargo capacity. The original Otter seats up to 11 people, can be fitted with skis and floats and features a unique four-unit retractable undercarriage. The Otter served as the basis for the very successful Twin Otter, which features two wing-mounted turboprops.

Since its first flight in 1951, the Otter has been an integral part of both military and civil endeavours including Antarctic exploration, development of many outback parts of the world, and U.S. Army mapping and survey work in the Americas and northern Africa. Only 466 DHC-3 Otters were built, with production ending in 1967.

Cessna 185

Passengers: 2-3

Number in Harbour Air fleet: 2

Also known as the Skywagon, the Cessna 185 is a single-engine, high wing aircraft with non-retractable conventional landing gear and a tailwheel. The Skywagon can also be fitted with floats or skis. From 1961 to 1985, over 4,400 Cessna 185s were built. This aircraft is widely used in bush flying, the commercial transport of people and freight to remote airstrips and floatplane-accessible lakes primarily in North America.