

By FLGOFF Julia Ravell

AFTER just two years of competition experience, Reservist pilot FLTLT Grant Piper is a national champion, blitzing the opposition at the 2006 Australian titles.

Flying his homemade RV-4 aircraft, FLTLT Piper took out the Sportsman category at the Australian Aerobatics Championships, as well as the prize for highest overall score in the competition.

Although he only started competing in 2004, the Australian title was the culmination of more than 14 years of patience and persistence in which spare time was devoted to building a competition aircraft from scratch.

“I learned how to cut metal at RAAF Base Richmond in 1989 and built the tail in my garage or on the veranda at home during the time I was posted there,” FLTLT Piper said.

“The wings were mostly done in my spare time during my next posting at Wagga Wagga, and the fuselage was built after I moved to Williamtown.

“While I was building the plane, I moved house seven times, built one house, got married and had three children. That’s why it took so long.”

A beef cattle farmer in the Hunter Valley, FLTLT Piper transferred from the Permanent Air Force (PAF) to the Active Reserves in 1998 after a 10-year piloting career.

He’s currently based at 26SQN flying PC-9s on advance reconnaissance missions for the Forward Air Control Development Unit (FACDU) at Williamtown.

“When I first left the PAF, my flying skills went off the boil quickly. Aerobatics competition has definitely helped my Reserves role as it’s easier to stay current and my skills are maintained at a much higher level,” he said.

FLTLT Piper is aiming to compete against the world’s best in Europe and the USA, but he has to build another aircraft first.

“Competition aerobatics appeals to me because of the precision and rigour required to fly the figures well. Judging is quite objective and to do well the thinking and the flying have to be spot on,” he said.

“I plan to go on with the sport and compete internationally, and to that end, I have started building another aeroplane with unlimited class capabilities.

“It won’t take 14 years this time (I hope), now that I have all that other stuff out of the way.”