

Rumblings in

There's a quiet little rumble in the ranks, and it's all about Rylstone. Shelley Ross looks at one man's plans to turn an underutilised NSW country airstrip into a cosy, affordable airpark.

ABOVE: Rob Loneragan plans on transforming this quiet country aerodrome into an affordable and accommodating airpark.

RIGHT: Lining up on Rylstone's grass runway.

FAR RIGHT: Rylstone lies within that critical three-hour radius of Sydney.

Rylstone

If you've never heard of Rylstone, then that's probably a good thing. This tiny country NSW town, near Mudgee in the stunning winery region of the central tablelands, is one of the state's most blissfully underdeveloped and charming towns. Think olive farms, gourmet food and log fires.

A wander through the main street will uncover two pubs, a little bakery, a couple of exceptional cafes, a few stores and a great hardware shop. From a pilot's viewpoint, however, there's something that might catch your eye a few miles out of town. The grass cross strips of Rylstone Aerodrome have been here for over 50 years and, apart from the occasional visit by a training aircraft or a semi-regular club day for microlights, it has been mostly left to languish in that lush green valley, unused and unloved.

But one pilot is about to change all that. After lusting after this beautiful airfield for close to eight years, and dismayed at seeing such an aviation

paradise go unnoticed, Sydney-based pilot Rob Loneragan has finally bought the aerodrome. Loneragan was born and raised nearby at Gulgong, and after spending the past 20 years in the hectic pace of Sydney, he can't wait to get back out to the country. He has a dream he wants to share with like-minded pilots and aircraft owners, and Rylstone is the focus.

The vision

In a nutshell, Loneragan's company, Loneragan Aviation, is seeking to turn the underutilised Rylstone Aerodrome into a unique, affordable and beautiful base in the country for a passionate aviation community. Loneragan Aviation will have parcels of land for sale in three sizes, to accommodate any size of hangar that people are interested in erecting, including larger hangars shared by a group. Then there's a separate 20 acres which is suited to hangar homes, for those looking for a complete lifestyle change.

"But that's only the beginning,"

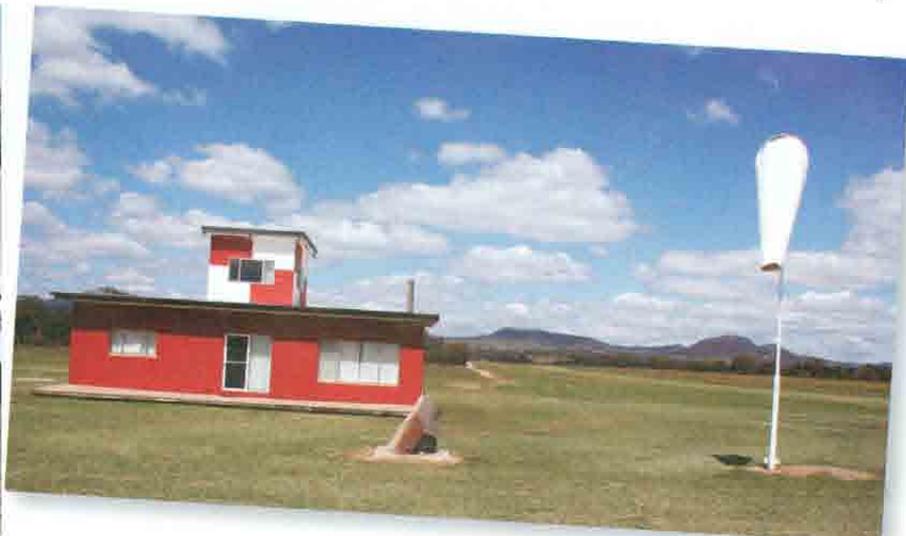
Loneragan explains. "There's an old clubhouse there which I'm currently renovating, and I see that as becoming the central hub for the aviation community. So, on a Friday night for example, it'll be a cosy, welcoming place for everyone on the airfield to congregate for a glass of wine and a BBQ as they wrap up work in their hangar, or stroll along from their hangar home, or maybe they've just driven up for the long weekend and want some company.

"And the fire pit. I'm going to build a fire pit outside the clubhouse where you can have a glass of red wine in your hand, in the peace and serenity of the country, and enjoy looking up at the stars."

Loneragan keeps stressing the lifestyle angle, an often intangible element when dollars are at stake.

"It won't be for everyone," he continues. "But it's got to make sense to those aircraft owners who can't find affordable hangarage in Sydney or nearby."

Australian Flying made some



enquiries and has found that an average price for hangar space at, say, Bankstown Airport is between \$800 and \$1000 a month. One pilot we spoke to, currently paying \$980/month, expressed his frustration with then having to pay a movement fee plus an additional Airservices fee every time he departs the airport. Another pilot we spoke to looking for hangar space told us that on the NSW Central Coast the waiting list is years, not months.

The big plus about Rylstone is that it lies within that critical three-hour radius of Sydney. Any further out than that and you'll start making excuses for not doing the drive. Once you're there, it's hard to argue that the ambience of such a picturesque little airfield in this country setting would make you wonder why you even hesitated.

Though closer to Sydney, the tiny town of Rylstone shares the region with Mudgee, the long established home of world class wineries, olive farms, gourmet food and the best of regional accommodation. Rylstone is slowly emerging as a gourmet destination itself, highlighted by its hugely popular annual Rylstone Street Feast, a celebration of local foods, wine and produce.

Airparks in Australia have had mixed success rates, so Loneragan knows he needs to offer pilots more than the usual.

"In its very broadest sense, I want there to be a wide-ranging opportunity for people to be able to make Rylstone work for them. For example, there's a gentleman

in Sydney who has multiple vintage aircraft that he doesn't fly very often. He wants to keep them all hangared as economically as possible. The appeal to him is that he can stop paying rent, he owns the asset and now has a secure place he can store his spare parts and his aircraft, where he can go and work on his aircraft whenever he likes."

At the other end of the scale, plans are underway to put some budget, container-type bunkroom accommodation on the airfield for visiting parachutists, etc, who don't need the luxury of nearby hotels or B&Bs. At the very least, Rob will make it mandatory that all visitors to Rylstone will land (for free) and stay for a coffee in the clubhouse before heading off. *Australian Flying* calls in on a vast number of regional airfields around Australia where a simple welcome like that would make our day.

A certain look

As part of the aviation dream, Loneragan has a vision.

"I don't want to see a shanty-town, tin shed thing happening here," he says. "To enhance the experience for everyone involved, I have a standard and an ultimate look envisaged for Rylstone Aerodrome. Any buildings that are approved here will be subject to standards.

"We'll help anyone who needs it, but I want this to be a community that everyone is proud to be a part of. So you can't go and pull down an old shearing shed and recycle the old iron to use it ... as charming as

that may sound."

Maybe there's something in the dream. There's something in it being so close to Sydney, and there is definitely something appealing about the country lifestyle. Who'd miss not sitting endlessly in traffic, waiting in queues to pay another toll and wondering whether the cloud base will let you out

of the Sydney Basin today anyway?

"When I get the hell out of Sydney," Loneragan concludes, "I wake up next morning on the airfield at Rylstone, and I'm watching a light mist that's just clearing over the runway. It's the start of a gorgeous day and I think, 'God, why would you want to be anywhere else?'"





AIRLINE ACADEMY
of AUSTRALIA
BRISBANE AUSTRALIA

- Airline Pilot Training
- Command Instrument Rating
- Flight Instructor Ratings
- Crew Resource Management
- ATPL Subjects
- Full Aerobatic training

AUSTUDY APPROVED
Diploma of Aviation
(Instrument Flight Operations)

Limited Places Available

Airline Academy of Australia
Beatty Road,
Archerfield Q 4108
Fax (07) 38751639
www.airlineacademy.com.au

**Contact Cherise on (07) 3276 7044 or visit our website
for further details and course start dates.**