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MEDIA RELEASE

VALE MAX HAZELTON AM OB

Rex today paid tribute to aviation pioneer Max Hazelton AM OB, one of the founding fathers of the airline, who passed away peacefully last night in Orange, NSW.

Max, who was three weeks short of his 96th birthday, had long been regarded as Australia's greatest living aviation pioneer whose legendary exploits revolutionised regional and agricultural aviation.

"Max was a much loved member of the Rex family who will be forever remembered as a remarkable trailblazer who built an airline from scratch, was a catalyst for change and left an indelible mark on the Australian aviation industry," Rex Executive Chairman, Lim Kim Hai, said.

"He remained close to the airline as a Rex Ambassador right up to the present day," Mr Lim added.

"We have lost a true national treasure," Rex Deputy Chairman and close friend, the Hon John Sharp AM, said.

Mr Sharp lauded Max's legacy which, he said, lived on today across the Rex Group and was reflected in the values of the family business culture Max and his wife, Laurel, established when they started a charter airline 70 years ago.

From humble beginnings in a paddock at Toogong, near Orange, Max planted the seeds of his aviation dream as a crop duster pilot, pioneering the spraying of cotton crops at night to avoid the winds that made day time flying near impossible.

His exploits in rural aviation led to the development of Hazelton Airlines which grew to become a major regional operator employing 270 people and carrying 400,000 passengers a year to 23 remote and regional centres.

Along the way, his leadership and effective lobbying of the then Department of Civil Aviation led to a raft of regulatory changes which helped fast track the development of both agricultural and regional aviation.

While his ongoing battles with the bureaucracy were making headlines it was his 1954 real life struggle for survival after crashing his four-seater Auster Aiglet in bad weather near Oberon, NSW which thrust him into the spotlight.

It sparked what was then the largest search in Australian history and with each passing day, hopes of finding him alive began to fade.

Lost and alone, Max walked 100 km through rugged terrain before eventually emerging from the bush six days later much to the astonishment of a captivated nation.

Max set flying endurance records, locked horns with Bob Hawke and the ACTU by defying a union ban to fly live merino sheep out of Australia, flew medical mercy flights, fought bushfires

in his planes and campaigned vigorously for Sydney Airport's third runway. Along the way, he brought safe, affordable and reliable air services to regional areas.

In light of his contribution to aviation he was awarded an OBE in 1980 and in 1991 an AM.

Hazelton Airlines, along with Kendell Airlines, was eventually absorbed by Ansett not long before the carrier collapsed in 2001 with Rex emerging from the wreckage the following year.

Mr Sharp said Max was a quiet, humble man who would be forever remembered for his unbridled passion for, and love of, both aviation and his family.

He wasn't afraid of hard work, with his dedication, determination and drive underpinning his many extraordinary achievements

"Max's heart was always in the country which is why this sentiment is emblazoned on our aircraft and remains the ethos on which this company has been built

"Today, though, Rex's heart aches more than a little at the loss of someone very special who meant so much to so many," Mr Sharp said.

"We extend our sympathies to his wife Laurel and their children Toby, Carolyn (deceased) and Max's grandchildren.



Max Hazelton in Sydney onboard Rex's Boeing 737 before Rex's inaugural domestic flight to Melbourne on 1 March 2021.

Members of the Rex Group



Rex is Australia's largest independent regional and domestic airline operating a fleet of 61 Saab 340 and 7 Boeing 737-800NG aircraft to 58 destinations throughout all states in Australia. In addition to the airline Rex, the Rex Group comprises wholly owned subsidiaries Pel-Air Aviation (air freight, aeromedical and charter operator), the Australian Airline Pilot Academy with campuses in Wagga Wagga and Ballarat, and propeller maintenance organisation, Australian Aerospace Propeller Maintenance. Rex is also a 50% shareholder of National Jet Express (NJE), a premier Fly-In-Fly-Out (FIFO), charter and freight operator.

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