



# BAA-ING access

James Turner tells of his  
woolly situation

Security fencing at metropolitan airports is always an issue in dealing with theft and vandalism. Operators of small country airfields cannot afford the expense of a high perimeter fence, and often settle for a cheaper post and wire boundary.

The incident happened in early April 1982 at a country airfield and flying school on the outskirts of Geelong. At this time, the whole state was in the first stages of an eighteen-month drought, after a very dry summer. A paddock full of sheep neighboured the eastern side of the airfield's runway. Unlike the neighbouring runway and the areas on either side of it, this paddock was bare of vegetation. Separating the hungry sheep from this 'all-you-can-eat feast' was a basic neglected post-and-wire fence.

I was carrying out solo consolidation circuits in a Cessna 150 after having done my first solo two weeks before. It was a warm, perfect day for an enthusiastic, but inexperienced student like me to practise all of the basics programmed into me by my patient instructors over the summer. The sun was shining from a cloudless sky, with only a mild, southerly breeze blowing directly up the runway.

It was on the fourth and last circuit of the afternoon that one of those classic 'great moments in bad timing' occurred - one that was over in a few seconds. I had turned from right base at seven hundred feet above the ground, onto a final approach of about fifteen hundred metres to the threshold. After selecting full flaps and trimming for sixty knots on a simple low-power glide approach, I was mentally prepared for a routine end to the circuit. This seemed to be the case, as the last few seconds ticked by and the ground and runway drew closer. Everything was OK until some trouble-making sheep had other ideas. What a sight! I was between two and three hundred metres from touchdown and about a hundred metres over terra firma, when a single mass

of multi-legged wool made its way through the pathetic excuse for a fence. They swept commandingly onto the first fifty metres of strip past my preferred landing point, to commence a heads-down grass fest.

Now, I'm not going to say that my whole life flashed before my eyes, but it was obvious that serious injury or death was just seconds away. As Corporal Jones in 'Dad's Army' would say: 'Don't panic! Don't panic!' So I didn't.

Yes, the colourful language that quickly ensued was followed a split-second later by the application of full power. Fortunately, as well as providing a smorgasbord for a battalion of sheep, this strip defied convention by being much longer than most other main runways in the region.

After passing low enough over the invaders to make them lift their curly heads and wonder sheepishly 'What the @\$% was that?', I landed further down without incident, and taxied back to the office. Loudly, I then gave advice of this incursion to my instructor, who said words similar to, 'Oh, not them back again,' before getting in his car and driving away to clear the trouble-makers from the strip. The sheep were never a problem for me after that, but it was still a preventable event. It had happened before, and had the potential to fluster a less-confident student. ☘