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FLIGHT FILES

THIS SPORTING LIFE

AIRBORNE AUSTRALIA'S WIDE RANGE OF MICROLIGHTS, NANOLIGHTS, GYROS AND HANG GLIDERS HAVE BEEN WOWING ADVENTUROUS PILOTS FOR YEARS, AND THE LEGENDARY NEWCASTLE COMPANY HAS TAKEN THE INDUSTRY BY STORM ONCE AGAIN WITH THE RELEASE OF THE HIGHLY-ANTICIPATED XT-912 M3 SPORT.

WORDS ROWAN STEWART

“wild flying”

Following in the tyre tracks of brilliant trikes such as the XT582 series and the more advanced range of XT-912s, the M3 Sport is plenty of fun to zip around in, but also offers a level of sophistication not often seen in aircraft at this price point. The best features of its predecessors have been shined up from front to back, and we're happy to reveal that the M3 Sport offers an unrivalled flying experience.

The microlight market is evolving at a rapid rate, with the features and capabilities bringing them ever closer to much more expensive aircraft. The avionics suites available in modern microlights, new wing technology, and comfort advancements mean that the mini marvels are appealing to a larger array of aviation enthusiasts than ever before, and the M3 Sport is perhaps the most impressive on the market at the moment.

Sure, it can still be wild flying - although the relatively basic nature of microlights is a large part of their appeal - but with the M3 Sport it isn't necessary to give up all the snazzy features of far more expensive planes.

The cockpit has been completely redesigned in order to provide a more comfortable experience. It's slightly wider than the older model, allowing for more room to stretch out, as well as plenty of space for storage.

The seats have seen marked improvement, and have been built to last longer, whilst also allowing for more leg room. The change is immediately noticeable upon stepping into the M3 Sport, and sets it apart from other micros.

It's not just the inside of the cockpit that's been transformed, because the outside has seen improved aerodynamics for a smoother ride, including much more protection against wind buffeting.

The dash has been simplified, and has a cleaner, neater look that actually improves functionality. There are plenty of instrument options to match any budget, allowing pilots to build the sort of aircraft that perfectly meets their needs.

The electrical systems have also undergone big changes; they've been overhauled to reduce their complexity and noise levels. Not only does this allow for a more pleasant flight, but it also makes the guts of the aircraft more durable and easier to maintain.

Other minor alterations include slight modifications to the battery to allow for easier access, and improvements to the fuel system that allow for real time updates on fuel use and levels.

The snazzy new XRS wing is the most notable feature of the M3 Sport, and it more than delivers on its potential. The underside sail area has been increased, and the tip struts have been modified to provide a more rigged winglet mounting. The winglets have been custom designed to improve stability and wing efficiency, and these features make a huge difference to the way the aircraft flies.

There are actually three versions of the XRS wing available to M3 Sport buyers, aimed squarely at beginner, intermediate and advanced pilots. The XR-M is the slowest of the trio and is excellent for short field take offs and landings. It has a relatively short wingspan and is particularly friendly in rough conditions, meaning it's the perfect entry point for someone taking to the skies for the first time. It has a respectable top speed of around 45 knots.

The intermediate XR-K can reach speeds 10 knots above that of the XR-M, due to a handful of notable improvements. It utilises a standard dacron top surface and also has a kingpost with wire bracing, paving the way for a lighter wing that's still strong and speedy.

For the serious pilots, however, the only option is the incredible XR-S. This thing is truly amazing, with a mylar top surface and a sleeker form that allows for speeds of up to 60 knots. The underside sail area has been increased, leading to a dynamic

and versatile wing that is right at the cutting edge of technology.

The new features certainly look impressive on paper, but it's not until you actually ascend into the clouds aboard the M3 that it becomes apparent just how advanced it truly is. Takeoff is a dream, thanks to the enlarged wheels, and the machine climbs beautifully. The Rotax 912 engine has more than enough grunt to power this tiny titan, and it can hit impressive speeds in a heartbeat.

Once up, it's striking just how straight it tracks, largely thanks to the fancy new winglets that provide plenty of stabilisation. There's almost no adverse yaw in the turns, meaning a reduction in sharp twists - for many pilots, that's going to result in much more pleasant flights with fewer nasty surprises.

The controls are particularly responsive without ever making it feel too difficult to keep in line. The M3 Sport will do what you want, when you want it, and if a heap of fun to cruise around in. As you'd expect, it's easy to land and can be put down in a space the size of a postage stamp, with the tough new wheels proving to be more than a match for the rugged Aussie landscape. In fact, the entire build structure is perfect for this tough land, with the brawny framework, beefy engine and reliable electronics allowing it to effortlessly explore every inch of the continent. Since hitting the market late last year, the M3 has proven to be a raging success both domestically and internationally, with sales exceeding expectations. The Airborne factory has been bursting at the seams to meet demand, and microlight pilots from Brisbane to Ballarat and Berlin to Boston have been gobsmacked by the performance of this wonderful little plane.

The M3 Sport is the next stage in the evolution of microlights, boasting features, stats and comfort that were, until recently, thought to be beyond the grasp of microlight pilots. It's an incredible machine that can be tailored to meet the demands of a wide range of aviators, and is versatile enough to handle a huge array of demands and conditions. It's fun to fly, reliable and well ahead of its time - and we highly recommend that you get out there and have a whirl in an M3 Sport as soon as possible. ✨

