

## Warhorse beats flashy cousins

By HELEN CORCORAN

The Dakota might not be the most sophisticated or comfortable plane in service — but at least the ancient warhorse of the flying world got off the ground yesterday.

This is more than could be said for the Dakota's multi-million-dollar domestic cousins sitting idle right round the country.

The Dakota — the immortal "biscuit bomber" or "gooney bird" or "dizzy three" — celebrates its 50th year of service with the RAAF this month.

Two of the four still in service marked the occasion yesterday with a state-ly sweep across Canberra's uncluttered skies.

It was a far cry from the days when the Dakotas were the ugly old pack-horses for the RAAF, carting cargoes and troops the length and breadth of the country and wobbling their way around the globe with little more than hand compasses to guide their pilots.

RAAF historian Bob Piper thinks they are the only type of plane anywhere in the world to have been in continuous service for 50 years.

Air Marshal David Evans, who carted Governors-General and even the Duke of Edinburgh around Australia in a Dakota, described the planes yesterday as "wonderful old birds". But the former Chief of Air Staff ruefully admitted he nearly scuttled the remaining fleet some years ago.

He said that he could not think of any good use for the craft in a more modern air force. But he said the reaction from his RAAF mates was so strong that the fleet was scaled down, not abandoned. — AAP



Picture: ANDREW CAMPBELL

A Dakota on its stately sweep of Canberra yesterday.