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FEW PILOTS who have not flown into the desert airfield outside the Namibian coastal resort town of Swakopmund for the past year or so, will easily recognise it for it is undergoing a major transformation.

This is mainly thanks to Danie van der Merwe, of Windhoek, who took over control of the airport last year determined to make it the benchmark for other small town airports around the country. Van der Merwe is also the managing director of Comav (Pty) Ltd, an aircraft leasing and charter company based at Eros Airport, Windhoek, so he has a vested interest in the Swakopmund Airport.

Within a few months of taking over the airfield, three new 375 square metre hangars were erected. Since then a further ten hangars have either been erected or are in the process of being erected. The



new hangars range in size from 180 square metres to 500 square metres and represent a capital investment of approximately R4-million.

The north-western perimeter fence of the airfield had to be shifted to make room for the new and future hangars. When the structures currently being built

have been completed, the airfield will boast more than 40 hangars, resulting in it having one of the biggest aircraft storage facilities in southern Africa.

The improvements to the airport have also included the recent installation on runway 06/24 of the night landing system known as “Landing Eyes” which was designed and developed by Gavin Brown, an engineer from Durban. This is the first application of the equipment in Namibia



Top: Transformation underway – part of the new hangar complex. When completed, this complex will contain more than 40 hangars.

Above: Work is now underway on the new headquarters being built for the Desert Skydiving Club.

Left: The newly tarred runway with the “Landing Eyes” night landing aid reflector units in place.

and has already proved extremely successful, especially for mercy flights.

The system basically employs specially-designed highly reflective plates mounted in such a way that they reflect light from an aircraft's landing lights and can be seen from a distance of up to four kilometres on a clear night.

Enthusiastic positive reports have been received from pilots of both iSOS and eMed Rescue who have made use of the system at night.

It was tested by the Namibian DCA and found suitable for night landings. Subsequently, a Notam was issued informing pilots of the procedures to be followed when making night landings at Swakopmund.

But it is not only in the areas of hangarage and night landing facilities that



A start has been made on enlarging the passenger terminal.

improvements to the airport have been effected or are underway.

A start was made recently on the enlarging of the passenger terminal facil-

ities. New offices have been added as well as additional toilets. The new layout of the terminal will improve passenger flow and thereby enhance security. The terminal extensions were due to have been completed at the end of last month.

During July the main runway, 06/24, was temporarily closed so that it could be tarred. The full 1 600 metres was tarred to a width of 18 metres. The work was done by Colas (Pty) Ltd., of Okahandja.

The tarring of the runway should reduce severe abrasive damage to propellers of aircraft caused by sand being drawn up into them when starting a take-off run.

The runway at Swakopmund has always been difficult to identify from the air, particularly when strong winds are blowing and when approached by "foreign" pilots since its previous sandy colour blended perfectly with the surrounding desert. Now, together with the double rows of Landing Eyes, the tarred runway is visible from a long distance and pilots should no longer have difficulty in seeing it.

Last month the necessary lines were painted on the runway and a number of identification signs were erected to direct pilots who are not familiar with the layout of the airfield. The main taxiway to be used at night will also be demarcated with blue reflective signage to make it easier to see the edges of the taxiway.

A special run-up pad has also been constructed away from the terminal so that aircraft that have been worked on at an engineering facility on the airport can be tested away from the terminal area.

Apart from the considerable investment in infrastructure during the past 12 months, a number of new aircraft ranging from microlights to a Cherokee 180 and two Cessna Caravans have been purchased by owners based at Swakopmund Airfield. →

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