

## John Dickenson - Profits left hanging by glider

In the 1960s New South Wales inventor John Dickenson took out a provisional patent on what became the world's first hang glider. For sheer brilliance and daring, his work was way ahead of its time and it has subsequently made him famous in sport aviation. If things had gone as they should have, it would also have made him rich.

But it didn't.

It all started in 1963 with the Annual Jacaranda Festival in Grafton. The local water ski club asked Dickenson to build and fly a water kite as part of the show. What he came up with surprised everyone. Instead of a conventional flat-kite - the kind that we usually see at water festivals - Dickenson built a model based on the flex-wing principle with a single hang point on a A frame. It flew well and it was the first time in the history of the Festival that kites had been flown without injury.

In October '63 Dickenson filed for a patent and was awarded a provisional patent. He continued fine tuning his glider and a year later all flight and construction problems had been solved. Dickenson's 'Ski Wing' was made from wood leading edges and aluminium cross-booms with iron A-frames and blue plastic sheeting for sails and it cost just \$24.

Dickenson's innovations over the months he spent building that kite started hang gliding as we know it today. So why hasn't he made millions from his invention?

"I made the mistake of letting the provisional patent slide," Dickenson said.

"At the time I had a young family, I was young myself, and the cost of taking out a patent was prohibitive. I needed £10,000, which in those days was a lot of money. It's the same today - patenting is a very expensive business."

"I spent two years trying to find backers for the glider but no-one was interested; they didn't understand what it could do."

This is a trap for many inventors developing products which are ahead of their time. IP Australia advises inventors to seek expert help with protecting and developing their intellectual property.

Gary Kichenside, IP Australia's Marketing Director, says that your local Inventors' Association is a good place to start.

"To become rich through their ideas is every inventor's dream but only a very small percentage ever get their ideas to market. This is not necessarily because they are bad ideas. Often it's simply because the inventor lacks expertise in areas such as



business planning, manufacturing and marketing, all of which are needed to successfully profit from an invention."

"For an inventor looking for financial support to get his or her idea up and running, they need to show it will fill a need, that there is market demand for it and this is not always an easy question to answer. Some ideas are so revolutionary that it can take years before people recognise their potential," Kichenside said.

In 1996 Dickensen was awarded the Order for Australia for his contribution to aviation. And as an inventor he has not been deterred. Among a number of inventions to his credit is a highly innovative flow device for measuring water flows such as Sydney storm water. Work on this is still underway but Dickenson is now taking all the steps necessary to protect his intellectual property and it promises lucrative returns.