

COLD WAR HEROES KEEPING ALIVE

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Despite the weather situation people are dedicated as ever to do what they must do. Those who spent years with engineering and offer their experience must feel very satisfied again when they see them rolling. And this is more or less the only thing what they do and they do this well. Welcome to the famous Bruntingthorpe taxi-runs.

Run but not fly

The taxi runs attract every year public, especially aircraft enthusiasts to watch the spectacle of low and high speed runs with classic cold war aircraft types. Old times are revived with the appearance of the Vulcan, the Victor, Buccaneers and Lightning's and the last taxi able Comet. Lots of money were needed to bring them in the situation this far which is a taxi run with fully running engines and blasts off in a spectacular way to stop some hundred meters further with all the brakes, avoiding a take off except those aircraft who are especially licensed to do so like the Vulcan XH558. Lots of maintenance, unpaid caring and thousands of man-hours were put in from those who shared their lives with these aircraft and many donations from the people make it possible. Most involved persons in this field have their roots in the RAF or were heavily influenced by for example their father as an air force veteran. Nevertheless they have a splendid task by focussing their dedication to keep this history alive.

A Victor in his hands

When talking to the people on the showground during preparing phase on the evening before you find out they are all like family and sure they have a lot of stories from history to share. Inside the victor XM715 'Teasing Tina' one of people which I supposed was crewmember said; I am from the Comet but it is so cosy to gather in the Victor. Standing under the wing of the Victor I met Robert Prothero who is performing runs with this aircraft and willing to talk enthusiastically. On his question: 'What do you want to know ?' must be the only answer: everything ! He spent years of his life on flying the Victor for the RAF starting in the very beginning with the B.1 version and actually stopped, making his last sortie in 1982 on the K.2. After an interval of decades some three years ago he entered this world again with the Brunthingthorpe Cold War collection of the British Aviation Heritage and everything was starting over again. XM715 is one of the only two taxi able Victors in the U.K. and taxiing is the nearest thing you can get to close action while concerning the Victor the days of flying are in the past. This is different for the Vulcan XH558. This aircraft was completely stripped and built up again consuming an enormous amount of money which was donated by people to the 'Vulcan to the Sky thrust funds'.

To get everything certified again you're talking about millions of pounds sterling. Sadly the Vulcan was not coming in flying action this time because of paper work which was not completed for authorisation. The Vulcan is unlike the other aircraft flyable and will appear on bigger events like the Waddington Air show or RIAT. This last one we'll keep in mind, since RIAT 2008 was cancelled unfortunately due to the very bad weather conditions. For the public of Bruntingthorpe event they let the engines run to show the supporters what they have reached.

A plane with history

Coming back to the other star of the show XM715, Robert explains that the Victor was quite handful to fly. This because it is a very sensitive aeroplane, and when you imagine that air-to-air refuelling is within close limits such as formations of the Red Arrows it makes it easier to understand the aircraft needs professional handling. Actually in those days the Victor as a bomber could carry more load (35.000 pounds bombs in racks of seven) than a fully loaded Vulcan which was able to take 28.000 pounds. The Victor as a result of highly developed aerodynamics wasn't even able to drop the bombs blocked by airstreams and therefore a special fin on the fuselage was fitted before the bomb bay to create turbulence so the bombs could fall clearly. Some stories are to remember well and Robert could tell for hours. Luckily for him he can give demonstrations to the public on the handles of 'Teasing Tina'.

XM715 served with 139 and 100 squadrons, 232 OCU, 543 squadron and converted to K.2 with 55 Squadron at RAF Marham before sold to the Walton family at Bruntingthorpe. Teasing Tina flew her missions in Iraq during the Gulf war in operation Granby and every refuelling sortie was painted in black on the nose of the aircraft with its sandy desert storm colours.

Preservation groups

About the Bruntingthorpe showgrounds in Leicestershire which is owned by the Walton family there is also a remarkable history to tell. The airfield was paid by the U.S.A. as a sleeping base and when necessary they could bring in their B.47 Stratojets in time of tension. At that time two Victors were sometimes located at the base as the RAF tried to spread locations of nuclear bombers as much as possible to avoid easy targeting for the Soviet Union. During this cold war period the Victor could be launched in the air within 35 seconds with the obligation to retaliate by sending his nuclear load in a Blue Steel missile. This period ended when the nuclear deterrent role was taken over by submarines. The Victor was handed over to the Walton family who do not only organize the taxi runs but have the area with its 3000m runway also in use as location for racing car events. Several preservation groups of cold war aircraft do have their residence over here. Such groups are the Lightning Preservation Group, Buccaneer Preservation Society and the Vulcan to the Sky Trust (VTST) group which managed to let the XH-558 fly again in October 2007.

The aircraft was owned by David Walton and the Walton Aviation Division Ltd. but when handed over to the VTST and pointed as the national treasure, fundraising could bring in donations to reach the amount of money to transform the Vulcan from a high speed taxi runner to a flyable aircraft again. This was done with help of Marshall Aerospace renewing everything needed.

Lightning QRA

Another important activity on Bruntingthorpe was the establishment of the Lightning Quick Reaction Alert Hangar which was obtained in kit form from RAF Wattisham. The Lightning served as a mach-2 interceptor for almost thirty years and earned much appreciation with its fans. The QRA hangar or Q-shed was of the same type as those of Binbrook, the last RAF base employing Lightning's. However the Q-shed is in kit-form but plans are settled on a fully completed Q-shed hangar like in the cold war period situated on Binbrook. This again requires donation money to establish this. Several formerly personnel of Binbrook including Captain John H Spencer, formerly base commander and yet Lightning fast run demonstrator joined the Lightning Preservation Group (LPG). Many Englishman feels proud when one of the two Lightning's F6 is speeding away with full reheat reaching speeds approaching 150 mph. and challenging the pilot not tot take off. The LPG open days are usually held in

conjunction with the British Aviation Heritage which is concerning the other aircraft types already mentioned. These comprise three Buccaneers including one in naval outfit, an ex Polish Air Force Iskra, a Swiss Hunter, a Jet provost in bright red white colours, a Canberra in DRA colours and the ex-Boscombe Down Comet 'Canopus' still in DTEO markings. Sadly heavy rain was falling the whole day of the runs but no problem to diehards and spectacular too with all those streams of tiny water drops behind the aircraft. Everyone hopes the organizers, pilots, engineers and everyone else will keep up the good work as long as possible. For those who love these scenes is visiting Bruntingthorpe a must but on a few other locations it is also possible to see another Vulcan taxi able and sometimes you can find your luck in a museum such as in Gatwick Aviation Museum. Here a splendid Buccaneer Mk.1 in white, blue and red colours was refurbished by Peter Vallance with a Rolls Royce Giron Junior engine and sometimes they let it run for a while. Yes indeed what a lovely country it is! Good Old England and it's Traditions.

Dutch Aviation Support
