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THE BOOT CAME DOWN HARD on the roof, and again and again. No gratuitous violence this, merely the instigation of a fine example of Old Warden's occasional forays into high technology. This is CAPA — Commentator Actuated Public Address! The amp was thrown into drive in the room beneath and the well known tones of the Shuttleworth Trust's display commentator since 1971 reached out to the audience.

Shuttleworth is not the only venue for this voice, the list being both long and varied: SBAC at Farnborough (deputy in 1976, 'item' commentaries in 1972 and 1974); Yeovilton's International Air Day 1984-1986; World hot air balloon championships 1977; International Air tattoo 1976 and 1977; various Battle of Britain At Home dates at Abingdon, Coltishall, Leuchars and St Athan; the Tees-side Air Show; Innovation 85 — six day event at Cranfield; Belfast's Air Fair Spectacular 1985; multiple USAF events:— Alconbury, Bentwaters, Chicksands, Wethersfield, Woodbridge. And this is just a selection...

From Culdrose in Cornwall to Sumburgh in the Shetland Isles, from Belfast to Bentwaters in Suffolk, all via Hyde Park (The Queen's Silver Jubilee Balloon Meet in 1977) the tally of events stood at 290 by the end of 1986.

As well as the hallowed ground at the Shuttleworth Trust's Old Warden aerodrome there is one other place above all the others that this particular voice is most associated with. That is the huge USAF base at

Mildenhall in Suffolk. Starting in 1976 and 1977 with one-day events, the displays here became the exceptional two-day Air Fetes from 1978. 1986 therefore saw eleven years at the 'Hall as the man behind the microphone.

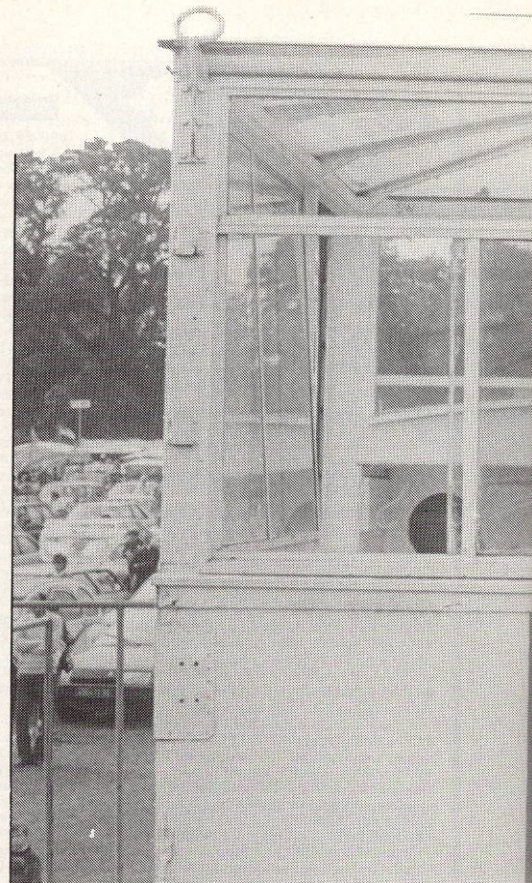
So many *Airshow 87* readers have heard him at work. But *who* is he? The answer is Roger Hoefling, although you will never hear him tell you so across the PA, nor will you find the name in the programme. Roger explains "The loudest word you can ever hear over the PA is 'I' — there is no point in centring the narrative on yourself."

Aircraft and pilots are what air displays are about. Regular air display attenders are however well aware that the commentator is something not to be taken lightly at a display. It is no good assuming that all that is needed is the gift-of-the-gab and a quick wit. A commentator can make or break a flying display no matter what skills may be being exhibited in the air above the audience.

Roger Hoefling does about 20-25 airshows per year, although on a year-to-year basis that figure can vary considerably.

During 1986 Roger was patient enough to let the Editor put him under the microscope to see the work of a display commentator in action.

The venue for this interrogation was Old Warden which was most fitting as this was where Roger first took up the art. "If you ever



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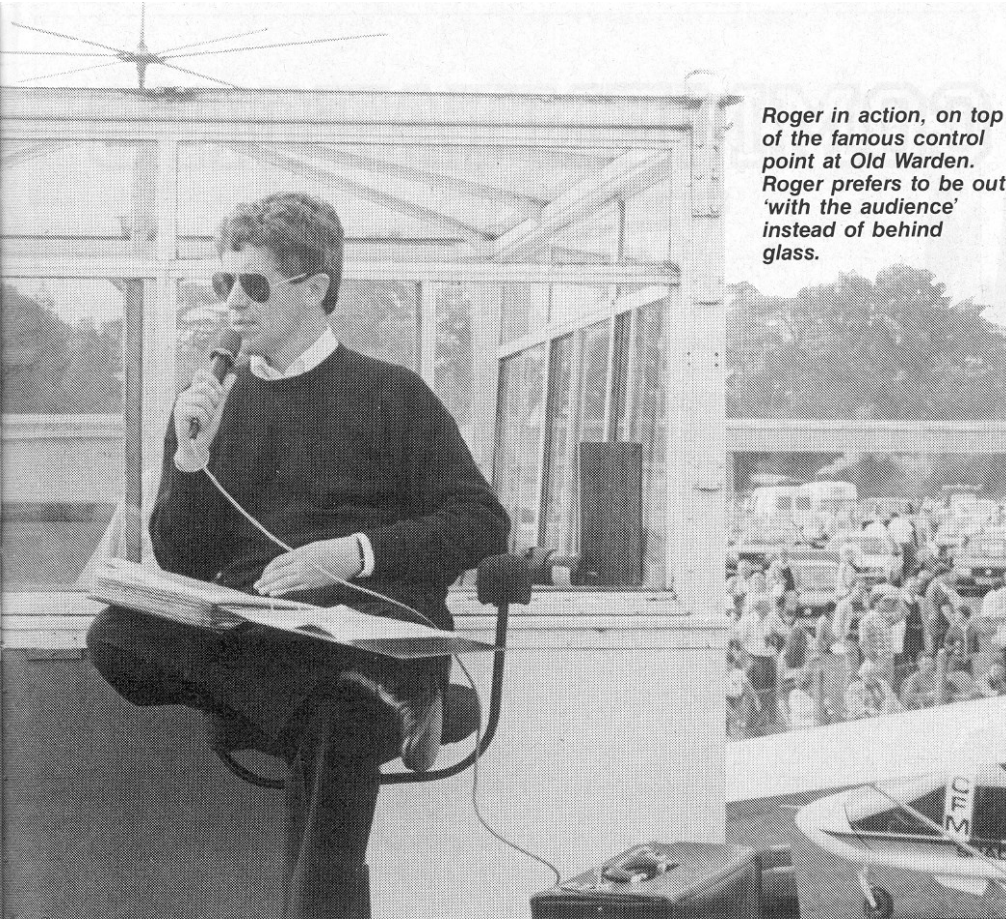
The art of the airshow commentator is much admired — *Airshow 87* examines one of those famous voices — **Roger Hoefling.**

Left: Shuttleworth's Miles Magister. (Jeff Bloxham). Right: Adversaries at rest. The Shuttleworth LVG and Bristol Fighter. (Ken Ellis)

get stuck, let me know!" Roger made this offer to his colleague Alec Lumsden at the British Aircraft Corporation (now part of British Aerospace) Pall Mall offices. Alec was then the Shuttleworth commentator. This was 1970, and the following year Alec took Roger up on his offer. Roger's debut was the Spring of 1971 and he's been taking the Old Warden audiences through their busy programme of shows every year since.

Old Warden has developed its own unique atmosphere over the many, many years displays have been staged there, and Roger is very much part of that scene. The aircraft of the Shuttleworth Collection do not change too much (perhaps in colour scheme or powerplant) but just the same research into





Roger in action, on top of the famous control point at Old Warden. Roger prefers to be out 'with the audience' instead of behind glass.

them for commentary notes is always going on.

For example, the Trust's Blackburn Monoplane has been found to be the Type D, thanks to research by the late 'Jack' Jackson and by Peter Green. Roger is quick to slot that into his copious notes. Roger estimates some eight hours research for each new type of aircraft is needed. The audience won't expect errors, and there will always be someone out there keen to point out a fact that has gone astray. Roger insists on finding four references to assemble to back each piece of data.

At a venue such as Old Warden, Roger is well aware that a proportion of the audience will attend every display in the season and it just will not do to give out the same narrative each time. So the notes, which are kept in a loose-leaf, plastic wallet-type folder, vary for each particular aircraft to ensure variety.

Roger's folder is a good example of the experience he has developed. It can easily be shuffled to take in the inevitable changes in display sequence. More importantly, being plastic, Roger does not have the horror of watching his hard work turning to *papier mache* when the British climate chooses to make its presense felt!

Roger can be seen outside at every one of his commentary venues. He refuses to go indoors behind the glass — no matter what the weather may wish to do. He takes his own mic and lead with him as it is a trusted tool of the trade and has proved well up to the rigours of the job. "You get a much better perception of the display if you are outside with it," says Roger, "besides both you and the audience feel closer if you are in the open with them."

TATOR'S



A COMMENTATOR'S YEAR



Above: Shuttleworth flight-line: Bleriot, Spitfire, Gladiator, Hind, Magister, Tutor, CFM Shadow.

Right: Ken Wallis in his 'James Bond' Wallis WA-116 Agile clobbers an 'enemy tank' — all part of the Old Warden magic.

Below: Classic vehicles and classic aircraft, the atmosphere at Old Warden cannot be matched anywhere else. (All photos Ken Ellis)

Although he probably knows Shuttleworth's display organiser David Ogilvy's patter at the briefing backwards, Roger is in attendance each time, taking notes. Alterations in clearances, display sequences and routines, the weather, the available airspace, all can affect what Roger will say to the awaiting public.

Words with Shuttleworth's General Manager, Peter Symes, to see what needs mentioning — what goodies from Betty Knight's souvenir shop need a 'plug'! Roger always makes sure to mention what the Old Warden Village Hall stand has to offer — good relations with the locals are very important.

Then there is a word with the emergency services and of course Air Traffic, who are always close to hand to give changes on a minute-by-minute basis. The larger displays — Mildenhall being the largest — follow much the same line, although the interviews and the briefings can be spread over a long time.

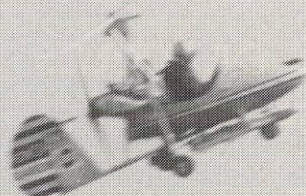
At the 'Hall Roger will need at least two days preparation for the script, let alone all the other elements of the Air Fete. Unlike many other venues, Roger is heavily involved in the planning, formulation and execution of Mildenhall as well as being the display's 'voice'.

For somewhere like Mildenhall or Yeovilton, Roger will need a day talking to base personnel and units. Here he will ferret out what's new — aircraft changes, unit achievement, what items to 'plug', new attractions etc.

Then comes another day with the visiting pilots. He needs to know similar information from them, plus career outlines, how their routines will go, particular news and events. This way, the audience can be informed with all the background material but also be given up-to-the-minute details with authority.

A careful and thorough briefing with the





emergency services is something Roger considers essential. Delving into the "What if..." side of a show is not a morbid interference by the commentator. His is a vital element in the smooth dealing with any emergency — either side of the flight-line fence — Roger is the 'voice' of a display. In a crisis a new voice over the airwaves would at once be unfamiliar and distressing.

Meanwhile, back on top of the Old Warden watch office, Roger has deployed the CAPA and the show is on. Roger's style is very much his own — all commentators have a 'signature' in this way. The commentary is delivered in short, but flowing measures of factual and anecdotal material.

While the script is a reassuring 'anchor' in the wallet in front of him, Roger is quick to capitalise on the vista unfolding in the air in front of him. The audience can be made to feel much more part of his 'patter' if it is clear he is much more than a tape-recorded voice-over. So early on the directions of the airfield are introduced so that his listeners will follow instantly when Roger tells them to look to the south east, or whatever. The audience are made to feel as though they are being let in on a few well-guarded secrets and that their particular knot of the crowd alone has been imparted with a snippet of information.

Aeroplanes are noisy things and a good commentator knows that there are times when it is a skill to be quiet! At one of the Shuttleworth shows last year Stephen Gray's collection paid a guest visit. Roger worked overtime with the ON-OFF switch on his trusted microphone so that the audience could take in the roar as the P-47 Thunderbolt, P-51 Mustang and P-40 Kittyhawk took over with their own particular commentary!

When he is not commenting Roger can be found in the audience at air displays. This is not a busman's holiday but a recce trip. Unless he experiences the work of fellow commentators and how things are done at non-Hoefling shows, Roger will lose very quickly a grasp of what is going on in the rest of the display world.

Relationship with the audience is all-important. The applause at the end of a show for the man whose name they do not know is an audible audience market survey, Roger never plays down the audience, he is there because of them, not the other way around. He is always prepared to listen to them, read their letters and reply where need be. He is after all part of the product they have paid for.

His most hectic period so far? Three shows in one weekend! Leaving the car at Old Warden and by taxi to the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Thurleigh, Bedford, he hopped on board a 750 Squadron Jetstream T.2 twin turboprop and flew to Royal Naval Air Station Lee-on-Solent on the Hampshire coast. Here he commented at the HMS *Daedalus* Air Day. At the end of the show by 705 Squadron Gazelle HT.2 of the Sharks display team back to Old Warden.

Up on to the famous watch office, down goes the boot and the CAPA again swings into action for a Shuttleworth Twilight display when the less wind-tolerant specimens take to the air — the Boxkite, the Bleriot and that Blackburn Type D.

CAPA is deactivated, the microphone and lead put into the briefcase along with the beyond-value wallet of notes. Into the car and off to arrive at midnight in Shropshire ready for Sunday and commentary at the Weston Park Air Day.

This year, keep your eyes and ears open for Roger Hoefling — he won't tell you he's there but the show won't be the same if he isn't. If you are at Old Warden, get yourself down to the red and white watch office as the show starts — see if you can spot the CAPA in action!