

March-May 1988 Number 5

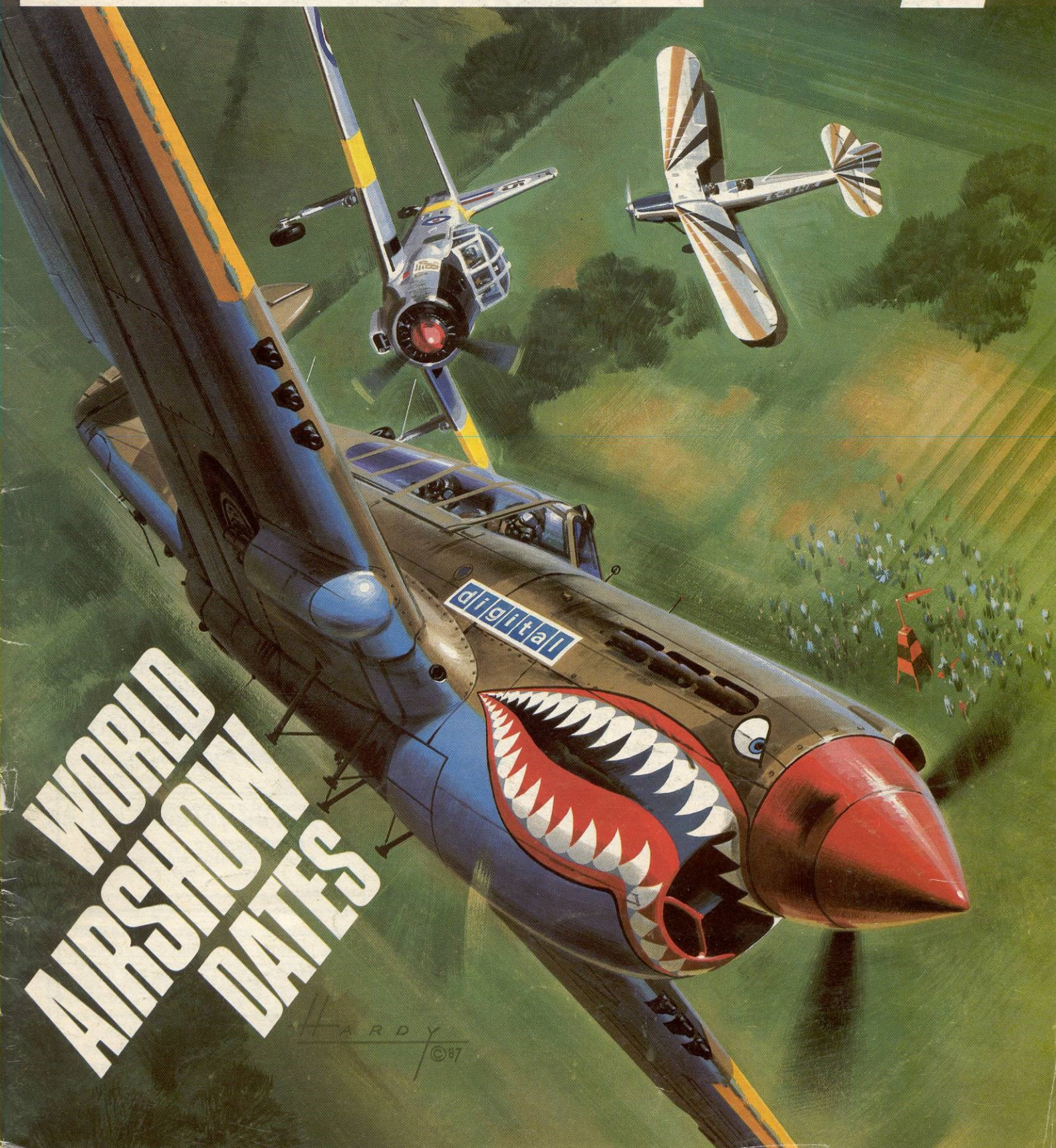
IAN ALLAN

ISSN-0951-0613

£1.50

# AIR Display

## INTERNATIONAL



WORLD  
AIRSHOW  
DATES

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sport aircraft, the all-metal, low wing monoplane has a cantilever tail unit and retractable landing gear. Built for the East German national aerobatic team, the Yak-50 obtained by the British display pilots is registered DDR-WQR and when it was flown to West Germany at the end of last year (escorted by an East German MiG fighter as far as the border to prevent it being inadvertently shot down) it had only 29hrs flying time. When it arrives in the UK it will be the only contemporary Russian designed and built aircraft in this country and the only privately owned example of the type in the world. This will be underlined by repainting it in

Russian Air Force colours, similar to the markings carried by the WAC winning Soviet team. This superb aerobatic aircraft with its characteristic growling engine will be available for a limited number of airshows this year. Enquiries to Aerosuperbatics, Hammerton House, North Cerney, Cirencester, Gloucester or telephone 028583 237.

*Right:*  
After arrival in Britain the Yak will be painted in these Russian AF markings.

*Below:*  
Yak-50 DDR-WQR in East Germany before its flight to the West.



## REFLECTIONS OF '87

FOR ME 1987 was a vintage year for airshows because the scale and variety of the displays that were organised, both service and civilian, provided for the public a marvellous array of aircraft and associated equipment spanning the whole breadth of aviation literally the world over. Obviously, 1987 will be remembered for the triumph and tragedy affecting the historic aircraft movement, with the bright dawn of the Blenheim's return to the skies suddenly eclipsed by its destruction. Hope springs eternal in the breast of Graham Warner and his colleagues which will, we hope, be matched by the financial support needed to resurrect a sister ship in the near future. One of the finest memories for me in 1987 is undoubtedly the privilege of seeing Graham Warner's Blenheim in its element at Biggin Hill in May.

The 25th Anniversary Air Fair probably had the most comprehensive and entertaining flying display of the year. British summer-time may still have got

it in for Jock Maitland and his team but it cannot prevent the Air Fair from being a success. However, I would like to see a bigger and more comprehensive static aircraft display, with special emphasis on general aviation, as used to be the pattern of past Air Fairs. The ground exhibitions are excellent, on the other hand, the Marlboro Pitts Stop was an innovation which was clearly popular with the public.

I find it ironic that the two best airshows of any year come so close together at the beginning of the season, the other being the Mildenhall Air Fete of course. Roger Hoefling and his colleagues from USAFE consistently score high marks for organising one of the biggest and the best displays put together by a single air arm and this year was arguably the best of the ten Air Fetes held at Mildenhall to date. What I like best about Mildenhall is that it is just the right size for a big two-day show, with plenty to see yet with plenty of time to do it in. The theme element is now an established

factor which guarantees a fascinating line-up of different aircraft each year. Air Fete 87 was for me the best display of the year; the one suggestion for improvement I would ask for would be a better distribution of the PA system so that the commentary can be clearly heard wherever you are on the base. Obviously what helps both Mildenhall and Biggin Hill to maintain such consistently high standards of entertainment is the employment of the two best airshow commentators in the business, Roger Hoefling and John Blake, something that the other shows overlook to their detriment.

It sounds churlish to complain about the biggest international military air display in the world but biggest definitely does not mean best in my view. The IAT at Fairford was extremely well-organised and contained many fascinating aircraft rarely seen in public in this country, but the sheer size of this airshow is, I feel, self-defeating. No matter how much of

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an aviation enthusiast one might be, tramping two miles of wall-to-wall aircraft is not the pleasure that the organisers imagine it might be. There is so much to see, both in the air and on the ground, that it becomes an arduous task to try and take everything in. But gripping apart, this IAT contained many memorable moments. Clearly the public loved the 'Frecce Tricolori' and the 'Halcones' (the scoop of the year where display teams are concerned) whereas from an enthusiast's point of view the Aussie contingent and the many varieties of C-130s were very welcome. Full admiration for the organisers' persistence in atrocious conditions on Sunday is deservedly theirs, as well as lifting one's hat to the pilots who flew in the full blast of the storm — particularly the Moroccan Cap-10 duo, the two RAF C-130s performing air refuelling and the courage of the Falcons in making a complete drop in such appalling weather.

The IAT's creation of a special camp-site adjacent to the air base was very welcome and well put together; this is an innovation organisers of other big two-day events might like to consider. Also the park-and-view facilities were excellent, needing only some refreshment kiosks and mobile loos to make them perfect! I am always surprised, however, at the IAT's choice of commentary team — their Radio 1 style of jovial chit-chat is irritating and like DJs from the same radio station they treat the audience as if it is naïve and easily impressed. A team, as used at Biggin Hill and Farnborough would suit this major of all major airshows much better. As a final note I would like to suggest that the IAT would lose very little by reducing itself in size, concentrating on two big themes in itself would bring in a fascinating array of aircraft, both for static and flying display, augmented by the spectacular display teams which the IAT is so famous for attracting. People would still come in their hundreds of thousands and it would be possible to enjoy everything at a much more satisfying pace. There really is only one International Air Tattoo.

Alconbury also had its own Air Tattoo comprising a very imaginative array of overseas fast jets. The stunning aerobatic capabilities of the Mirage 2000B and the soaring rocket climb up to 30,000ft, firing flares all the way, by the Norwegian F-16 and then spinning all the way down, were the kind of displays straight out of the Farnborough mould. All the pity then that Alconbury should choose one of the worst commentators I have ever heard. He could not tell the difference between an F-5 and F-16! Moreover, the event itself was soured for me by the quite threatening and hostile manner exhibited by the American security personnel as they hustled people off base at the close of the flying. I have

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now visited Alconbury on two occasions and both times I have found it to be the least friendly of all the American bases — I shall not be visiting it a third time, despite its well organised flying display.

Friendliness, however, was a very positive feature at RAF Brawdy during the station's Open Day in July. It was my first visit to this show and I was impressed by the gathering of NATO fast jets and bags of Hawks. The operational flight-line situated close to the spectators' area, à la Mildenhall, proved very popular and is a feature other military bases might like to adopt where it is feasible. The only grumble I had was the rather limited choice of catering available, which was very basic.

RAF Abingdon's Battle of Britain At Home Display is always good value and this year was no exception, despite the perennial weather problems. The organisers brought in more warbirds than usual this time, including Spencer Flack's Mustang and Kermit Week's Mosquito B35. You really cannot criticise this show, with plenty to see on the ground and in the air. The unadvertised appearance in the main hangar display of the Supermarine S-6A with the beautiful Schneider Trophy in front of it was a wonderful surprise. One small niggle, however — Abingdon do not make it clear in the advertising material about the start of the flying display; in the last two years they have adopted a morning show but the sweet-sounding WRAF I spoke to on the phone three weeks before the show assured me the flying would not begin before 1pm. In fact it started at 10.15am! A clearly stated time on the advertising literature would help.

As a nice contrast to all the heavy metal to be found in the military shows the Badminton Air Day proved a most relaxing and enjoyable event. A very well organised display in a beautiful setting. However, from a photographer's point of view I found the extensive line-up of parked aircraft close to the fence too obstructive and consequently lost some potentially good take-off shots. Some of the flying was quite spectacular and quite definitely no one could beat the ETPS Hunter FGA9, which really showed the F-16 and the Tornado what fast-jet aerobatics is really all about. The Diamond-9 Tiger Moth Team were also most impressive and will I hope become a regular feature of the display scene.

Finally, I attended three of the BAe/Rolls-Royce events in the South of England. The best was Hatfield, which was a complete Open Day although the timing of the flying display (between 11.15am and 1pm) seemed rather odd and inconvenient. Nonetheless it did make time for leisurely examination of the BAe 146 production lines, which were fascinating to see. Not even the DH Comet Racer's unfortunate ground

loop could spoil what was a very enjoyable day out, made all the more pleasurable by the very obvious enthusiasm the BAe staff have for the 146 airliner, which they conveyed by their willingness to discuss their work in fascinating detail.

What a pity that the same enthusiasm for meeting the public does not extend to the BAe and Rolls-Royce staff at Filton. Their Joint Families Day would make an excellent event if it were opened to the public, with the addition of display teams and fast jets. Some very impressive displays were given by the assorted airliners gathered to represent BAe's products, especially the Airbus A320, while Concorde's low-level wing-dip salute will remain in the memory for a long time. If you are like me, able to cadge a gate pass from a mate in the industry all is well, otherwise you are sentenced to peering over the fence. The big crowd of people which gathers each year to watch this event from outside the airfield is a true testimony to the fact that the public would come in large numbers to watch. So come on Filton, remember the taxpayer and open the gates to all. You have plenty of room as demonstrated by the RAGA airshows held there in the 60s.

The Rolls-Royce event at Leavesden adopts a middle course, opening the South side to the public (very rudimentary facilities) while keeping the North side to its own. The flying display was not extensive but did bring in Concorde and an interesting mixture of Westland helicopters, including a very lively Belgian AF Sea King, while even a Queens Flight Wessex got in on the act.

1987 will, despite the trials and tribulations suffered by some preservation teams due to loss of and damage to rare and valuable historic aircraft, remain as one of the best years yet from an aviation enthusiast's point of view. Not even the weather could really spoil all the fun, although it made its best efforts yet to do so. But what will 1988 bring us? Will the Americans come to Farnborough this time? Will the public be able to afford Farnborough this time? Indeed, the cash-flow situation could be a very significant factor in the immediate future for air displays. Will it be possible to buy packs of ASA 100 film in confidence in advance of an event, without being confronted once again by light conditions more suited to ASA 1000, as happened so often this past summer? Will the design of umbrellas become more imaginative than that of hang-gliders, judging by the frequency of their appearance in all the colours of the rainbow at so many shows in 1987? And will someone please tell me why today's modern, yuppy private pilots have girlfriends who all look like Glynis Barber?

Mark Ashley