

Life begins at forty!

Roger Cook visits Cranwell for the official Red Arrows 40th anniversary display. Additional pictures by **Robin Powney**, **Chris Chambers** and as credited

At RAF Cranwell on Friday 21st May, the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, The Red Arrows, formally launched their 2004 display season, the 40th season since the team was founded in March 1965. The display was to an invited audience that included the Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon, the Chief of the Air Staff, Chief of the Defence Staff, VIPs and other distinguished guests. Also present were two members of the original 1965 display team, one of them being perhaps the most famous 'Red', Ray Hanna, plus three from the ground support staff and six previous leaders of the Red Arrows, including the most recent, Wing Commander Andy Offer.



Teams - then and now



The Red Arrows were officially formed at RAF Fairford on 1 March 1965, led by Flight Lieutenant Lee Jones, flying seven Folland Gnat aircraft. In 1966 the number of aircraft was increased to 9, and since then the classic Diamond Nine formation has become the team's trademark. In 1979 the Red Arrows converted to the BAe Hawk. By the end of the 2003 season the team had given 3,750 displays in 52 countries.

The 2004 team, led by Squadron Leader Spike Jepson will give over 84 displays in the UK and Europe between May and September. The display this year includes a new formation to celebrate the entry of the Eurofighter Typhoon into RAF service as well as one of the formations originally flown in 1965.

The display at Cranwell was not the first show this year as the team have already given displays in Cyprus, Jordan and France, but they now commence a very busy season and we wish them well in their 40th year. It is disappointing that no commemorative markings have been applied to the aircraft to mark the 40 years achievement, but budgets are tight these days.

The distinguished guests at Cranwell were also able to see a display by a single Gnat aircraft in Red Arrows livery as well as a flying demonstration by a Typhoon from 17 Squadron.



Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon was a guest at Cranwell - here he meets the current team leader, Spike Jepson

2004 Red Arrows

Acknowledged as one of the world's premier aerobatic teams, the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team is the public face of the Royal Air Force. The Red Arrows exists to promote both the RAF's

corporate image and recruitment to the RAF, contribute to Defence Diplomacy, and support wider British interests through the promotion of British industry overseas. The Team is but a small part of a large organization, much of which is engaged on overseas operations defending UK interests, making the world a safer place and acting as a force for good.

Commanded by Squadron Leader Carl 'Spike' Jepson, The Red Arrows consists of over 100 officers and airmen drawn from throughout the RAF. Officially formed on 1 March 1965, the Team has now performed over 3700 displays in 52 different countries. The Red Arrows are based RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire.



1966 at Fairford - in the sixties the Reds were renowned for their amazingly low flying. Sadly safety requirements today mean fifty feet is the absolute minimum, but they're still a spectacle! © CROWN COPYRIGHT/MOD/RAFAT

All nine Red Arrows display pilots are fast jet pilots from front-line RAF squadrons. In 2004, the Team has pilots from all four front-line fast jet types; Jaguar GR3, Tornado GR4, Tornado F3 and Harrier GR7. To apply for selection to The Red Arrows, pilots must have amassed a minimum of 1,500 flying hours, one front-line tour and be assessed as above average in role. Each year competition is stiff; between 35 and 40 pilots apply for the 3 vacant positions on the Team. On completion of their three-year tour with The Red Arrows, the pilots either return to front line, instructional or staff duties.

Reds 1 to 5 form the front section known as 'Enid', and Reds 6 to 9 are known as 'Gypo'. The Synchro Pair, Reds 6 and 7, perform the highly popular, dynamic manoeuvres during the second half of the display sequence. There is one other qualified Hawk pilot: Red 10, who flies a 10th Hawk to display venues ready for use in case one of the other nine becomes unserviceable. Red 10's two primary roles on the ground at every display are acting as the Team's Safety Officer, maintaining two-way radio contact with the Team Leader throughout the display and as Team Commentator.

Efficient planning and organisation are vital if ten aircraft, support staff and equipment are to arrive safely and fully prepared at a display venue. Apart from the pilots, there are two Engineering Officers, a Team Manager, an Adjutant, a Public Relations Officer (the only civilian on the Team), and approximately 85 ground technicians and administrative staff known collectively as 'The Blues'. The Blues represent 11 out of 72 RAF trades. Before each display the Team Manager and Adjutant will have provided the organiser with a document showing timings, transit routes, personnel involved and equipment required. The Junior Engineering Officer and nine technicians known as the 'Circus', fly in the rear seats of the Hawk aircraft to display locations so essential servicing can begin before the main support team arrives.

Typically, more than 300 requests for Red Arrows' displays are received annually but only about 90 can ever be fitted into the programme. The Team also complete many flypasts each year as they transit from display to display.

For full details of the 2004 team visit the official website [here](http://www.airsceneuk.co.uk/hangar/2004/reds40/reds.htm).

Seeing Red



For a look at the Red Arrows' Hawks in history, click [here](#).

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Gnat T1 XR993/XP534/G-BVPP, privately owned, Cranwell 2004. Copyright Robin Powney 2004



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