

3rd November 2011

VIP Unveils Comper Swift

Unveiled on Thursday 3rd November 2011

The Royal Air Force Museum has today officially unveiled the Museum's latest acquisition, the Comper Swift CLA.7 G-ACGL. The aircraft was unveiled to invited guests including relatives of the aircraft's designer and of original owner in the Museum's Hangar 1, where it is now on permanent display to the public.

During the unveiling guests gathered by the Comper Swift for a welcome speech from the RAF Museum Director General, Peter Dye. Immediately afterwards the aircraft was unveiled by special guest Alex Henshaw Junior, son of Alex Henshaw Senior, the original owner of the aircraft. The Swift was flown by Henshaw Senior in several air races around the country including the Kings Cup Air Race in 1933 where he won the Siddeley Trophy. Other V.I.Ps at the launch included Comper Swift Aircraft Designer's grandson, Mr Stephen Perry and its Engine Designer's daughter Mrs Shirley Ann Manser.

Designed by Nicholas Comper, an ex-RAF Flight Lieutenant in the early 1920's, the first prototype Swift flew in 1929. Whilst designing the Swift, Comper drew on his experiences with the Cranwell Light Aeroplane Club (CLAC), a group founded by Comper as an extra curricular activity for RAF Apprentices. Members of the CLAC also included Frank Whittle and George Stainforth plus many other individuals who became legends within the RAF.

Only 41 Swifts were ever built and they were only available in two colours – red or blue of which the Museum's is red. Most were fitted with a Pobjoy R type engine and they were popular in air racing throughout the 1930's, 40's and 50's. At only 5ft high, 17ft long with a wingspan of 24ft the Swift could reach a maximum speed of 140mph. Big enough for just one person, a Swift was flown solo by Mr Arthur Butler between England and Australia in 1931 establishing a new record time. Another was flown to South Africa and only just missed out on the record.

Henshaw Senior sold the Swift G-ACGL in 1934 and it passed through four more owners before reportedly being scrapped in 1942. Henshaw went on to become Chief Test Pilot at Castle Bromwich Aircraft Factory and test flew more Spitfires than anyone else. The remains of the Museum's Swift were saved and secured by various groups until 2008 when its parts donated by Mr Stanley Brennan of Manchester to the Royal Air Force Museum. The aircraft has recently been restored by Skysport Engineering, Bedfordshire. There are now only eight remaining Swifts; four in the UK, one in Argentina, two in Australia, and one in Spain.

The Comper Swift is now on permanent display at the RAF Museum Cosford. The Museum is open daily from 10am and admission is free of charge. For more information on the Museum, visit www.rafmuseum.org or call 01902 376200.

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Notes to Editors:

- Photos available on request
- Royal Air Force Museum Cosford, Shifnal, Shropshire, TF11 8UP
- Open daily from 10am
- FREE admission
- For further information and all media enquiries please contact Michelle Worthington on 01902 376212 or michelle.worthington@rafmuseum.org
- RAF Museum Cosford images & logo available at: <http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/cosford/media-enquiries/downloads.cfm>

Full Aircraft History:

COMPER SWIFT G-ACGL MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER X004-6194

41 of this type were delivered, 1929-1934. Of these, 11 were built in 1933 and the last in 1934, after which the company went into liquidation.

26 Feb 08 RAFM archives staff visited the home of the late Mr Stanley (Stan) Brennan, in the village of Timperley, Gtr. Manchester. Mr Brennan had bequeathed his aeronautical collection to the RAFM. Whilst there, they were shown a garage containing aircraft parts, which were recognised as being those of a Comper Swift. The complete pair of main wheels/tyres and 15-gallon fuel tank (the latter marked CLA.7 and dated May 1933) were brought back to RAFM Hendon that day.

4 Mar 08 Remaining parts recovered from Timperley to storage at RAFM Stafford;

80hp Pobjoy Cataract seven-cylinder radial engine, s/n 511, dated August 1934. (An engine type not used on the Swift)

Pair of main planes (minus fabric covering) Main spars marked WA 1575X/1; port aileron marked C/381, starboard aileron marked C/380. (Examination 2009 suggests these wings may be from two separate Swift aircraft)

Pair of V-struts

Pair of undercarriage legs

Box of wooden parts including wing structure and tail and rear fuselage parts.

No evidence on parts of a UK registration, but there are traces of red-painted fabric and red paint on the wing strut fairings.

Also recovered were some miscellaneous fuselage parts of tubular construction, a wooden section of wing structure and control column linkages, identified by Skysport as being of Comper origin in 2010.

It is of note that in March 1961, the wings of former Alex Henshaw aircraft S33/6/G-ACGL were reported extant stored at Wolverhampton, and reportedly still extant in 2003-in 1961 other parts were reportedly at Elmdon. This aircraft was originally painted red. Photo-Aeroplane July 2008 p.5.

Correspondence from Mr Malcolm Goosey in July 2008 confirms that this is the Henshaw Swift. Its remains- wings and some rear fuselage components - were acquired from Eric Holden near Kinver (Manager at Castle Bromwich Airfield and a personal friend of Henshaw's) by Stan Brennan in the 1970s when he was a member of the Northern Aircraft Preservation Society (NAPS, later The Aeroplane Collection (TAC)), and he initially stored the parts in a NAPS/TAC store in Stockport, Cheshire and later near Wigan, Lancashire before moving them to his home at Timperley.

An outline of G-ACGL's flying career is as follows;

- 30 May 33 Registered (CofR 4360) to Alex Henshaw, Mablethorpe, Lincs. Given pillar-box red colour scheme. Photo of Henshaw with the aircraft – Flypast July 2010 p.20.
- 23 Jun 33 Certificate of Airworthiness (CoA) Issued
- 6 Jul 33 Flown by Henshaw at Hatfield, Herts for the 1933 King's Cup Air Race.
- 8 Jul 33 Won Siddeley Trophy at Hatfield, Herts, at an average speed of 127.78 mph over the 830.8 mile course. Photos-Air Britain Archive Autumn/Winter 2004 p.151.
- 20/21 Dec 33 Flown by Henshaw from Nice Aerodrome, France.
- 7 Mar 34 Sold by Henshaw.
- 21 Nov 34 Registered to Henlys Ltd, Heston
- Apr 35 Business taken over by Airwork Ltd.
- 15 Jul 35 Registered to Airwork Ltd, Heston.
- 14 Nov 35 Registered to David L. Lloyd, Castle Bromwich.
- 28 Oct 37 Registered to Patrick G Leeson, Braunstone
- 27 Jul 39 Registered to Edmund Bradley, Wednesbury/Kinver, Staffs.
- 22 Mar 40 CoA lapsed
- 1942 Fuselage reportedly scrapped at Kinver.
- 1 Dec 46 Registration cancelled at census
- 15 Feb 2010 Wings and other remaining parts by road from storage at RAFM Stafford to Skysport Engineering Ltd, Hatch, Beds for restoration under contract, including construction of new fuselage incorporating some original cockpit parts. Original parts sent were the two wings, two ailerons, two struts, parts of the left hand side cockpit structure, cockpit floor, rear 'A' frame, fuel tank, small piece of side panel, and engine accessories.
- Also sent was Pobjoy R 75hp two blade wooden prop 79/E/372, acquired by the RAFM from a different source. By March 2010 repair work on the wings was well underway, and they were completed by June 2010, along with the undercarriage. At this point the surviving section of port side cockpit structure and bulkhead supporting the wing were also under restoration, along with the original cockpit floor/control column mounting.
- On 12 Sept 2010, the forward fuselage of an unidentified Comper Swift was purchased by Tim Moore at an auto-jumble at Beaulieu, having been taken there by a Frenchman who found them in a barn between Poitiers and Chaterault. (Not in the end used)
- 14 Oct 2011 Completed aircraft by road to RAFM Stafford; on by road to RAFM Cosford for display 17 October.

Seven other Swifts survive – three in the UK, one in Argentina, two in Australia, and one in Spain;

S31/9	R222/LV-FBA	Buenos Aires, Argentina
S32/1	G-ABTC	Stored, Cornwall

GS32/2	G-ABWH /VH-ACG	Camden, NSW, Australia-airworthy
S32/4	G-ABUS	Stored, Shropshire
S32/5	G-ABUU/EC-HAM	Madrid-airworthy
S32/9	G-ACTF	Shuttleworth Trust, Old Warden, Beds
S32/10	G-ACAG/VH-UVC	Bankstown, Sydney, Australia

Plus Swift reproduction G-LCGL, completed 2011 using some one third of original parts; with Real Aeroplane Collection, Beighton.

TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON

ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM 2011