

## Hunter T7 XL563

The T.7 variant, based on the Hunter F.4, was developed as a private venture by Hawker Aircraft during 1954, the side-by-side seating version being eventually chosen. The prototype XJ615, (also having previously operated from Farnborough with ETPS in its latter years until it crashed near Haslemere on 29 September 1964), made its first flight on 8 July 1955. After much development, especially with various hoods and fairings for airflow improvements around the nose and cockpit area, a second prototype (XJ627) flew during 1956 which led to an order for 55 being placed by the MoD, 45 of these being for the RAF and 10 for the Royal Navy as T.8's.

Hunter T.7's have served with practically every RAF Hunter squadron for instrument training purposes, including OCU and training units, only finally passing out of service during 1993, as fully instrumented "Buccaneer trainers", whilst the T.8 variant served with the Royal Navy until being withdrawn during early 1995.

Built at Kingston, Surrey, then road transported to Dunsfold for completion, the first production T.7 XL563 first flew on 11 October 1957, and after hood jettisoning, cabin conditioning, handling with drop tanks, bombs and rocket projectile trials with Hawkers the aircraft was flown to Boscombe Down on 19 December 1957 for Controller (Aircraft) release trials work with the A&AEE, and later Ministry of Supply.

Returning to Hawkers at Dunsfold on 22 September 1958 further work was undertaken by the manufacturer before it was again allocated to A&AEE for gun firing trials arriving at Boscombe Down on 20 January 1959. Controller (Aircraft) release was given during May 1959 with the Hunter then returning to Dunsfold on 2 June 1959 then being allocated during September 1960 as a support aircraft for the P.1127 VTOL/STOL project.

Allotted to the Bristol Aircraft Company for use as a chase aircraft in support of the Bristol T.188 project to monitor the over water supersonic flight trials, the Hunter arrived at Filton on 23 January 1961 and remained with this project until released on 28 January 1963, the programme being terminated shortly thereafter.

Arriving at Farnborough on 2 May 1963 XL563 was taken on charge by the RAF Institute of Aviation Medicine (IAM) under whose name it operated for over thirty years until its retirement during July 1993, having accrued a total of 2,979.40 flying hours. During these years the Hunter performed many varied but essential tasks in undertaking valuable aeromedical flight research on behalf of the RAF IAM, by whom it was a well loved aircraft. Contrary to popular belief, this aircraft was not on the strength of the Royal Aircraft Establishment (later Defence Research Agency) as it remained with IAM, although was occasionally used by, and flown by, RAE pilots for trials or continuation training work.

During August 1993 the venerable Hunter was transferred to the Defence Research Agency Aircraft Apprentice briefings Training Department in "Q" shed where it was initially used for valuable engineering training work prior to it being finally dismantled, during April 1994, and was stripped of internal equipment ready for its new role as a ground display aircraft. This work was completed by the end of June 1994, just ahead of the demise of the DRA Aircraft Apprentice Department, and XL563 remained temporarily stored, in a dismantled condition, pending its future. At one time it was due for gate guardian duties DRA Centre for Human Sciences although the RAF still has a presence with the RAF School of Aviation Medicine), but a decision was then made to mount the aircraft on the well-tended lawns outside the No.1 RAF Officers Mess, on the hill at the eastern end of Farnborough Airfield, only a stone's throw from where Cody made his epic first powered flight during October 1908.

Parkhouse Aviation of Blackwater were contracted to build the plinth and assemble and mount the Hunter in flying pose, this being finally accomplished on 27 February 1995.

This has now added an historic and relevant aircraft for permanent display purposes at Farnborough testifying to its thirty year longevity of service from this famous airfield.

The Hunter remained 'poled' outside the No 1 RAF Officers Mess until 25 March 1999, when the Mess had become derelict and was due for demolition, (it was actually demolished between December 2004 and February 2005), to make way for the new Aviator Hotel that now stands on the site.

The Hunter was dismantled by Parkhouse Aviation and road transported to Kempston near Bedford on 25 March 1999 for a private individual (John St. Clair-Quentin) who intended to return the aircraft to flying condition. This fell through, and the aircraft was moved to premises in Southmoor, near Oxford, where the Hunter remained in outside storage in a dismantled condition until it was transported to Farnborough over 24/25 March 2014 in two separate loads.

The fuselage and wings were stored locally in the AAIB compound but these were moved to the FAST Museum premises on 9 December 2014 in three loads. The rear fuselage/tail assembly/tail-plane were already at the FAST Museum site having arrived directly in March. The historic Hunter T.7 currently awaits re-assembly and refurbishment by a team of dedicated volunteers at the FAST Museum.

Article by Peter J Cooper  
10 December 2014