

BY RAY CANON



THE AVRO JETLINER

Ahead of its time

The AVRO JETLINER C-102
(Photo courtesy of the Canada
Aviation Museum, Ottawa)

It is frequently forgotten that the period following the end of World War II in 1945 could well be considered the Golden Age of aviation in Canada. Not only were we producing the famous de Havilland STOL aircraft that were coming off the production line one after the other, Avro was producing the flying saucer, the CF-100, an all weather twin-engine fighter, and above all the legendary CF-105 Arrow.

But the aircraft that first put our country big time on the jet aviation map was the Avro Jetliner CF-102, a four-engine commercial jet that was years ahead of anything the Americans had under construction. The jetliner, which had been designed to meet a requirement of Trans-Canada Air Lines, made its first flight on Aug. 10, 1949, only two weeks after the

de Havilland Comet and almost a full six years before the Boeing 707 took to the skies.

To say that it caught a lot of people by surprise is putting it mildly. Canada was far better known for turning out planes like the de Havilland Chipmunk or the Noorduyn Norseman than anything with not one, but four jet engines. When the Jetliner flew over New York City, the inhabitants were dumbfounded. It was the first time any of them had ever seen a commercial jet, given that the 707 and the Douglas DC-8 were nowhere near the flying stage.

Interest was instantaneous! The US Air Force expressed a definite interest in buying at least 20 examples while the legendary Howard Hughes was able to 'borrow' it for a period of some

months. He also inquired about buying a number of examples for TWA, at that time one of the leading American airlines. Canada was on the aviation map in a big way and the future looked rosy.

The only initial cloud, and a small one at that, was the choice of engines; Avro had opted for the Rolls-Royce Avon. However, the British company, stung by the release (due to some political idealism) of its Nene engine to the Soviet Union where it was put to good use in developing jet fighters, was reluctant to let the engine be used even by the Canadian branch of a British company. In its place Avro was forced to make use of the Rolls-Royce Derwent that had been first chosen to power the Gloster Meteor.

As it was, the Jetliner

reached the speed of over 500 mph on a number of occasions, which was in the same ballpark as the de Havilland Comet.

But the rosy future the optimists had counted on did not have room for a government penchant for turning virtual victory into defeat. Ottawa decreed that production should be concentrated on the CF-100 because of the threat posed by the Korean War. Howard Hughes continued to show interest in the aircraft and at one time it appeared that Convair might, after all, actually produce the aircraft under licence for TWA.

That never happened. It was the ubiquitous C.D. Howe who stepped in and ordered Avro to scrap the Jetliner and pay total attention instead to development of the Orenda engine and the CF-100. In any event, the latter never got near Korea. Only one NATO country – Belgium – bought it and Canadian air enthusiasts were left to wonder what might have been. As if to prove that canceling the Jetliner was no fluke, Ottawa was later to do exactly the same thing even more egregiously with the Avro Arrow. The Kremlin comrades must have been laughing all the way to the vodka and caviar trollies.

Can one imagine what might have happened to the Canadian aerospace world if both the Jetliner and the Arrow had been put into service? Instead, both these fine aircraft "Rest In Pieces."

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