

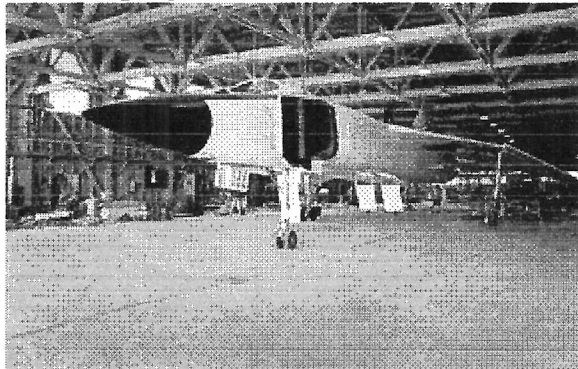
Avro Arrow on Centre Stage

By Bill Zuk

Almost 40 years after the original roll-out, an Avro Arrow is again on centre stage--this time, a life size replica of the Arrow is being used as its stand-in for a film shot in Winnipeg.

The Avro Arrow film starring Dan Aykroyd, Sarah Botsford, and Aidan Devine features a working model of the real aircraft. The origins of the scale replica had an unusual beginning. It came from the workshop of Allan Jackson, a 59 year old sales estimator working in the steel industry in Wetaskawin, Alberta. Beginning a long-term project of building an accurate replica of the Avro Arrow became a passion for Jackson who had completed a wooden mock-up of the nose section by 1993 and had envisioned its final completion for the year 2000 until the intervention of members of the film crew.

A joint production of Winnipeg's John Aaron Productions and Tapestry Films and The Film Works of Toronto; the producers of the Avro Arrow mini-series, Straight Arrow Productions, had been involved in a country-wide search for information on the famous aircraft project. Some of the search had been conducted on the Internet and it was due



to this tele-communications connection that the film producers and Allan Jackson were brought together.

After reading a book on the Avro Arrow, Jackson had been building an exacting model of the airplane based on the drawings in the book. In his workshop, he created a wood and metal framework that was accurate to within inches of

the original aircraft's dimensions. He finished each part carefully and slowly. When the Avro Arrow film Production Supervisor Tim Binder approached Allan Jackson with a proposal to use the model in the film, an arrangement was made to complete the model for the mini-series and then transport it back to Wetaskawin.

Allan Jackson's dream was now about to come true. The completed model is destined for a museum display in the future, but for now it will play an important leading role in the story of the Avro Arrow.

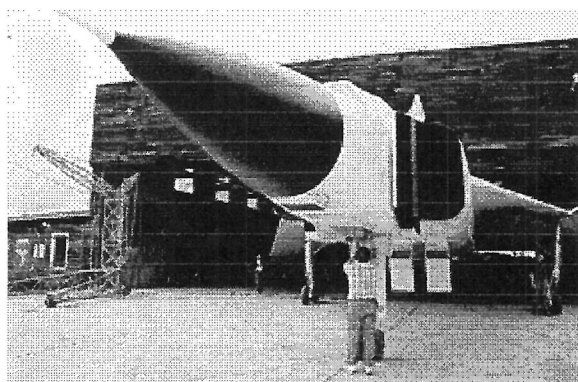
After the skeletal framework arrived in Winnipeg where principal shooting was to take

place, it became the job for David Melrose, construction supervisor to make it the movie Avro Arrow. For over 14 years, Dave Melrose has been involved in filmmaking. He is a consummate craftsman who said that the Avro Arrow film was the biggest project he has ever worked on. His leadership of the Avro Arrow model team led to the creation of the working model.

The Arrow model had to be finished by the end of June in order to be featured in exterior shooting that would take place at the Winnipeg International Airport. The nearly 24 metre long fuselage of the aircraft was assembled with the slightly longer than 15 metre wingspan delta wings next to be attached. With a team of 10 film set carpenters and craftsmen, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia native, Melrose, was faced with a daunting project.

The aircraft model had to look like the Avro Arrow but not to the point of being an exact reproduction- "it's movie magic.. all illusion, nothing is real" explained David. With the need to get things done in a hurry, the 39 year old supervisor worked with a mix of young and older crew members that were able to produce the parts needed to a deadline. When the tall tail of the Arrow had to be reproduced, he passed the job on to Ricco, the most experienced of the set crew. Within a short time, the tail was designed, laid out in a metal and wood framework and skinned.

The Arrow model looks at home in the large double bay hangar which is filled with post-World War II aircraft parts that originated in the Gimli compound of the Western Canada Aviation Museum. The model and the hangar slowly were converted into the Avro Arrow plant circa 1959 and the Arrow production line. The aircraft parts came from a diverse collection of surplus parts that even included sections of the cancelled Saunders airliner that had been assembled in Gimli. From the hangar floor, the model was set on spindly undercarriage that made the Arrow model appear like a real aircraft..



With the arrival of star Dan Aykroyd, who would play Crawford Gordon in the movie, came a flurry of publicity for the movie, and the Arrow model was finally shown to the press. Still resembling a skeleton, the model began to take on a more finished appearance as thin white aluminum sheets were fastened to the frame. The construction crew marvelled as aviation enthusiasts and curious onlookers appeared at the hangar for a look at the Avro Arrow.

Still working to their deadline, Melrose and the crew attached the large tail--it fit perfectly but just. The Arrow model had to be moved slightly backward so that the tail

would rest between overhead girders. With the aircraft sitting on its gear, the next step was taken--to make the Avro Arrow actually taxi. David Melrose had devised a set of DC powered motors on each of the main wheels. One of the crew, Drew, from Gibson, B.C. had the most "time" as pilot. He sat in the navigator's compartment where he could see a patch of floor below but nothing ahead.

On Thursday, June 20, the Avro Arrow model was ready to move from one side of the hangar to the other. A day ahead schedule, the model was headed out of the hangar. As production publicist, Ches Yetman and the production manager watched the operation, Anna Marie Boquist noted that the aircraft was covered in dust, and as the motors were started and the model shook the dust off as it moved slowly ahead. "It looked like it was coming to life..."

As video cameras captured the scene, the movie Avro Arrow made its first appearance out on an aircraft tarmac. Still without a tail, the 3 1/2 ton Arrow model still looked the part of its famous forebear.

In the recreated Avro plant on the other side of the hangar, the model finally received its tail and final details. David Melrose thanked his crew at a party held the night after. He was scheduled to leave Winnipeg on Saturday, June 22, but his job was done. The Avro Arrow model was ready for filming.

On the October day in 1957, a small boy, George Foley had come along with his mother and father to see the Avro Arrow. He was excited as all little boys could be on a special day--one where he could go to see where his father, a tool and die maker worked and of course to see the Arrow. As the music surged and the crowd cheered, George gazed at the wondrous sight of the glistening white interceptor. Sometime that day, a photographer spotted George at the red barrier and took a photograph that became legend- a little boy gazing out at the giant fighter. He didn't remember the moment but his mother told him about the photograph and that he was the little boy in the picture. The photograph appeared in many magazines and books, labelled "The future, looking at the future" in one book

It was not to be, unfortunately. After the roll-out ceremony and an impressive test flying schedule, the entire Arrow project was cancelled and nearly all the Avro employees were let go. George's father continued his work as a tool and die maker but no longer in the aviation industry; George's family drifted to Newmarket, Ontario and years later, he began a new life in Winnipeg.

Then on July 4, 1996, George Foley returned to see the Arrow once again. There it was, being rolled out into the sunlight in the midst of hundreds of cheering people. He had been drawn to the set of the Avro Arrow movie, and he was not the only person to have been at the original ceremony. Elwy Yost, the famous Canadian broadcaster and

one-time Avro Company publicist was there and Sylvia and Derek Wooley were there. Derek had been the flight-test engineer that had once carried Jan Zurakowski on his back after the first test flight. But the little boy was there as well. George had come back that afternoon with his four year old son--a blond haired, spitting image of himself in 1957. "I don't know what brought me here but I just wanted to see it again" said George.

The shooting schedule of the Avro Arrow film will take it into August 1996, with more scenes being filmed around Winnipeg and Gimli, Manitoba. But there will be no more important scenes than the roll-out of the Avro Arrow--once more on centre stage for the world.

Bill Zuk is an amateur aviation historian and writer whose interest in the Avro Arrow is long-standing. Currently a Teacher-Librarian in St. Vital School Division, he is also an active member of a number of associations involved in literature and libraries. When the Straight Arrow production team began work in Winnipeg, Bill asked for and received permission to chronicle the making of the Arrow film for various publications.



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<http://www.achq.dnd.ca/roundel/may96/arrow.htm>

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