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Home >> AvroArrow >> Don Rogers

| INTERESTING INFO | RANDALL WHITCOMB | PALMIRO CAMPAGNA |

Don Rogers



Don was chief test pilot at Avro Aircraft Canada Ltd. from the beginning of Jetliner flight test, to until after Black Friday and Arrow cancellation. Notably, he oversaw the entire experimental and development test flying of the CF-100, the only Canadian-designed and built fighter to reach squadrons. Even before this he had been chief test pilot at Victory Aircraft, which produced Lancaster bombers at Malton before Avro took over the facility.

Donald Howard Rogers was born in Hamilton Ontario Canada, on 26 November, 1916. Early interest in aviation led him to take flying training at the Hamiton Aero Club where he earned his pilot's licence in 1936. During this time he met a bright young girl named June and upon a chance meeting and a question relating to what he was up to, Don proudly mentioned he was training to become a pilot. June one-upped him apparently by producing a photo of herself beside a Fox-Moth, the date scribbled on he back proving she'd flown before he had! This lovely couple has recently celebrated their 62 nd happy year of marriage.



As war loomed ever closer in the late 1930s, Don's flying progress also continued. He took the Roy Air Force instructor course at Borden when war came for the British Empire and Europe in Sept. Then, as Assistant Chief Flying Instructor, No. 10 Elementary Flying Training School, Mount Hope to December, 1941.

In January of 1942 he transferred to the National Steel Car plant and test flew Westland Lysander Ansons. When the factory was shut down to change over to Lancaster production, Rogers joined the Ferry Command flight test unit at Dorval Quebec. Here he tested the Lockheed Hudson and Venturian maritime patrol-bombers, Consolidated B-24 Liberators and North American B-25 Mitchells. He made trans-Atlantic ferry flights, of a Hudson and a B-24. On one of these flights he stayed five days at Woodford, familiarizing himself with the Lancaster at Woodford, the main company airfield.

Victory Aircraft (which was the same National Steel Car plant but had been nationalised), rolled out a complete Lancaster on August 6 th , 1943. Rogers worked production test-flying until September, 1943. Then, Dobson, Smye and C.D. Howe worked out their agreement and Avro Canada was founded in December 1943.

Rogers assumed his position as Chief Test Pilot. In the beginning, the only work Avro had was in building and testing RCAF equipment such as Mitchells, Sea Furies, Lancasters, Dakotas and others, - with Don doing the check flight.

Once the Jetliner was ready to fly, Jimmy Orrell was brought in from Britain to test fly the plane. Orrell and everyone of consequence acknowledges that Don could have done the first flights, the claim Orrell was based on good reasons, -namely that Orrell had flown the Tudor 8, which used four Rolls Royce Derwent jet engines in an aircraft design not that far removed from the Jetliner. After the sixteen months Rogers took over as experimental test pilot on the Jetliner, Don probably broke more city to city records in Canada and the United States while showing off the Jetliner, than any man in history, -although Don's modesty ensures such a claim would never pass his own lips.

During the Avro Gas Turbines division TR-5 Orenda jet engine development program, Rogers flew the Lancaster test-bed aircraft (FM 209). This swift Lanc had the two outer Merlin engines replaced by turbojets. In this aircraft, the Orenda engine first flew with Rogers at the controls. He first flew this on 13 July, 1950 and thereafter flew hundreds of hours in each version, with the reality being that the development, -for the development test pilots at least- was more of an evolution to the final Mk.4N than big steps. Nevertheless, the final CF-100 versions were a far different (and better) aircraft than the prototype or Mk. 2's or 3's.

Don would fly challenging flights in the Jetliner and CF-100 to develop the systems for true all-weather operation in Canada. These involved the dangerous practice of seeking ice and some harrowing moments arose. Happily, the anti-icing systems were well designed and no aircraft were lost in this development.

Don relates in conversation regretting that history, and the Diefenbaker conservatives, conspired to prevent him getting the chance to fly the CF-105 Arrow. After Black Friday, Don went on to a distinguished career flying at de Havilland Canada where he flew all their aircraft types in test-flying and demonstration for potential customers world wide. He continued flying at DHC until he was 63 and continued training the de Havilland aircraft, until he was 70. He has 12,000 hours on 30 types. He notes that in his career he never had any difficulty getting along with anyone with whom he worked. Certainly, nobody he has met who knows Don has anything but kind and respectful words for this living legend. He once told the author, in Jim Floyd's presence, that he really doesn't like some of the hero worship he gets, claiming nothing special but rather attributing his success to "being in the right place at the right time." I replied "You were in the right place at the right time with the right skills and temperament!?" Jim Floyd heartily agreed.

He and June reside happily in Etobicoke Ontario, not far from the old Avro plant.

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