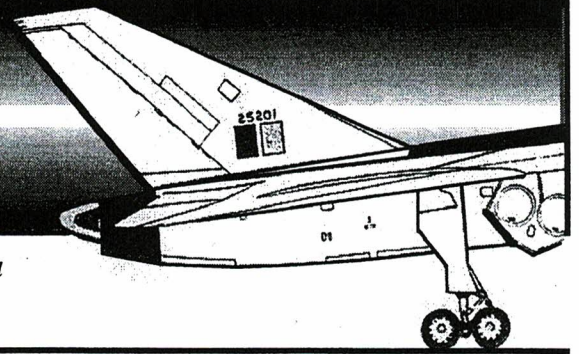


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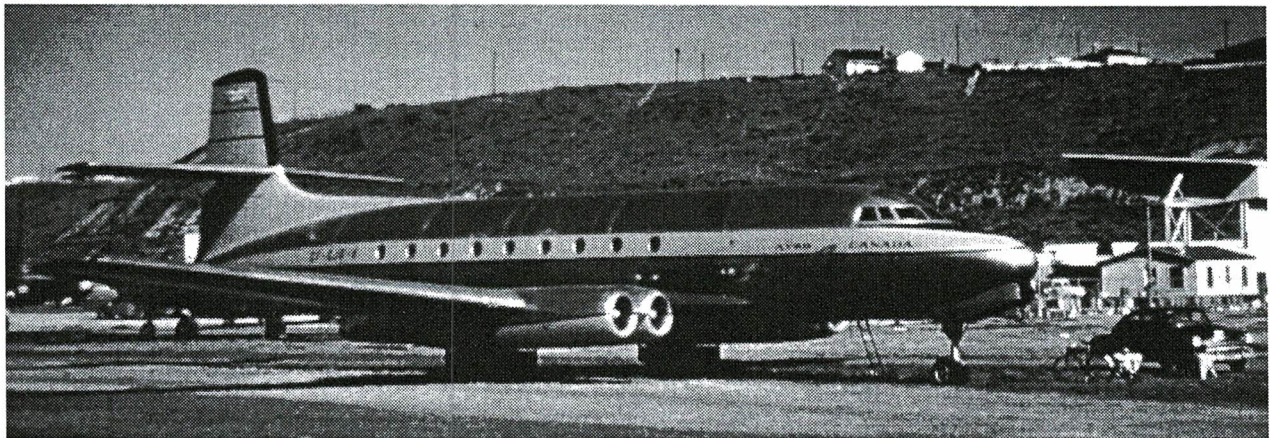
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FLYING IN THE JETLINER

by

William F. Wildfong



Avro Jetliner in Culver City

I was born in Gait, Ontario on July 29, 1919. A few years later, we moved to my grandfather's farm, just north of Hespeler. This was an interesting place to grow up in. Next-door was a flourmill, built by my great-great-grandfather. We kids used to visit it often, get a handful of bran to eat, and then go out to play in the mill yard.

The Speed River, which helped run the mill, ran just below the farmhouse, while out in front was the mill pond, which was great for swimming and fishing. We lived just on the edge of what was considered Algonquin territory and the Indians used to make regular inspection tours along the perimeter. My Grandfather could remember the Indians stopping by the farmhouse and spending the night, sleeping on the kitchen floor I still have a few of the arrow and spear heads which were found on the fields. When I was seven years old my dad decided to seek employment in the United States of America and set off with a friend to Buffalo, New York. He got a job running a

grocery store in a suburb of Buffalo and we soon moved to join him. This was an entirely new experience, living in a city and going to a new school. My older brother and I soon adapted and we enjoyed big city living. We had a theatre nearby and saw most of the shows as they came by. We distributed news of the coming shows and received free tickets. The old Erie Canal was only a few blocks away and we often delivered groceries to the Coast Guard boats. We also delivered groceries to some of our customers and would usually receive \$1.00 or \$1.50 as a tip! This sum of \$1.00 would get us into the show during the week and \$150 would do the same on weekends.

This idyllic situation was soon to end however as my mother did not like living in a big city miles away from her relatives and friends. The result was that we moved back to Canada and my grandfather's farm. Unfortunately we found ourselves in the grip of The Great Depression and this was not pleasant!

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From the President

I certainly hope that we are all looking forward to fine weather, now that winter is over. A great deal of interesting information and stories about the Jetliner have been received recently.

So look forward to upcoming issues of Pre-Flight, for we intend to share them with all our members.

Our 2010 AGM will be held at the Canadian Air and Space Museum on Saturday, June 19, 2010 at 10:00 am.

Frank

Flying in the Jetliner continued ...

My dad was a carpenter and had work for about six months, then nothing for six months. This lasted through my public school and my four years at technical school. The Depression was a hard taskmaster and while it taught the value of a dollar it also made that dollar very hard to acquire!

During my high school years I worked whenever I could for a dollar a day and two meals. However, about 1937 things improved and I secured employment at the local woolen mill. My dad and my brother both had steady jobs and life was good. I was proficient at sports and there was always a game going on in softball, hardball or hockey, which we played on the millpond or the outdoor rink in town.

My first experience with aircraft began when I was 21. I had a background of four years technical school as an auto mechanic and a desire for something better than the woolen mill where I was presently employed. A friend of mine mentioned that he was told they were hiring mechanics at #1 EFTS Flying School in Malton and he agreed to take me with him to apply for employment. We presented ourselves and were both hired for the princely sum of \$15.00 per week and our board.

When I started, we were flying Fleet Finch aircraft. These were good aircraft except for the carburetor having a tendency to ice up in cold, damp weather. I got hit with a propeller for the first and only time and had my first flight in this aircraft. We flew from Aberfoyle to Malton in complete cloud and when we set down we were at the airport. I marveled at the skill required to do this, but my pilot had been flying for years in the north before becoming a flight instructor.

Before the year was up we had switched to the de Havilland Tiger Moth with a Gypsy Major engine. This was a beautiful aircraft for a trainer and almost indestructible. Also, it was a challenge to rig properly so that it would fly hands and feet off. We claimed that if you could rig a Tiger Moth you could rig any biplane.

Soon my first two years were up and the news was that we were being transferred to De Winton, Alberta to take over a station twice as large from the Royal Force (RAF). The deal was that we would keep the flight instructors and the students who came from all over the world to join the R.A.F. It also meant that we would need more mechanics licensed by the Department of Transportation and I was lucky to be chosen as one of them. During this time we flew Stearman biplanes, Fairchild Cornells and Tiger Moths. We won the "Cock of the Walk" award for flying 10,000 hours in one month.

After two years in Alberta the war was almost over and I was given the chance to return to Toronto. Upon arriving there I was sent to Victory Aircraft and given a job as Flight Test Mechanic. It was an ideal time to join Victory as the Lanc's were just starting to flow from production. After some months I was made Crew Chief and given my own crew to look after. I was also checked out by the Rolls Royce representative to do engine runs on the Merlins. Finally Victory Aircraft was shut down and on returning to my hometown I was offered a job at one of the local garages.

I spent a year enjoying my mother's cooking and meeting and getting engaged to my wife, Audrey. Then a letter from Avro arrived offering me a job as Flight Test Mechanic. I accepted and returned to Malton. We were busy overhauling Mitchell's and Lancasters for the RCAF. In September 1949 I was picked for a Flight Engineer and spent many happy hours flying in the above mentioned aircraft with Don Rogers or Mike Cooper-Slipper.

In July 1950 we completed fitting the Lancaster FM209 with Orenda jet engines in the two outboard positions and Mike and myself were given the job of proving the Orenda engines were airworthy and ready for installation in Avro's CF-100 fighter aircraft. This involved flying at 30,000 feet in an unpressurized aircraft with no heating, no heated windscreen but with considerable more power than the four Merlins had provided and I enjoyed every minute of the 35 flights it took to complete the testing. Mike also enjoyed flying a bomber that performed like a fighter!

In October 1950 the testing of the Orenda engines was completed and I was switched to the Avro Jetliner. After years of flying in propeller driven aircraft it was pure delight to sit in a cockpit with no earphones on and hold a conversation at normal voice levels.

Flying in the Jetliner was a pleasure. We normally flew at 30,000 feet and the aircraft was as smooth as silk. I am sure that every pilot that flew this aircraft fell in love with it. We gave demonstration flights to every major USA carrier plus dozens of high-ranking military personnel and were evaluated by the United States Air Force (USAF) test pilots at Wright Field. One of the pilots was a Lieutenant Colonel Rosenfield who came to our hotel room in the evening to tell us how impressed he was with the aircraft.

Another pilot who was impressed by his first flight was Howard Hughes. He took over as pilot on his first flight and kept the aircraft for six months with Don and me as his crew. When we first landed at Los Angeles we were met by a bevy of reporters and photographers. This occupied about an hour of our time. About an hour later Howard (everyone addressed him as "Howard") arrived and welcomed us to Los Angeles.

He looked the aircraft over and informed us that he would like a flight the next day. He arrived as promised and then entered the aircraft and took over the pilot's seat immediately. After a short briefing by Don he taxied to the runway and prepared for take-off, leaving Don to handle all the radio duties.

In no time at all we were in the air and headed west toward the ocean. We soon arrived at the city of Long Beach, which is just south of Los Angeles and has an airport which we approached and Howard proceed to do six or seven touch and go's, leaving Don with the radio work again. I was a little apprehensive with a new pilot but Howard soon convinced us that he knew what he was doing. I learned later, from his mechanics, that this was standard procedure with all his aircraft and we used Long Beach airport because it was the only one around which had no landing fees!

This was typical Howard, he carried no money or jewelry and if he wanted to make a phone call after flying, he would borrow a dime from Don or me or anyone nearby and never repays it. We finished the first flight and in a few days we were informed that Howard loved flying a jet aircraft and we would be staying there for some weeks. What started out as 10 days ended up at six months.

Howard was flying two or three times a week with us. He would work all night and then spend an hour or so with the Jetliner. It was obvious that this was his recreation and that he loved the aircraft. When he wanted to know the time he would reach down and lift my arm and check my wristwatch. I enjoyed flying with him and acting as timekeeper to one of the richest men in the U.S.A.! We made one trip to Palm Springs, where Howard was welcomed by six or seven women friends. He always introduced us to them but then he would move them away to let us know he wanted privacy. This time we were rescued by the airport manager, who invited us to lunch at the tennis club. It was a lovely spot built using the side of a rock as one side of the restaurant. We flew back in the evening and enjoyed the sight of Los Angeles at night. Spectacular!

We often had some of the Trans World Airways (TWA) engineers on these flights. Howard told Don and me that he had warned his engineers to treat us with the same respect they employed with aircraft manufacturers in the States. He worried that they might look down at us, being we were from Canada.

He wanted to get Jetliners from Avro for TWA. Our own engineers were constantly arriving to have discussions with Howard on technical matters.

During the time spent in Los Angeles we had numerous entertainments supplied to us. We watched Danny Kaye one afternoon, another day we saw a Western being made, with catsup used as blood.

We spent 3 hours watching Bob Hope and Bing Crosby along with Dorothy Lamour making one of the "road" pictures and we watched Robert Mitchum and Jean Simmons at work another day. These visits were all to closed sets and we were the only visitors. Our favourite was Robert Mitchum who after meeting us, kept coming back and chatting between takes. Howard also organized a trip to Balboa on the Coast so that Don could do a little sailing. This one tickled my fancy because Howard included the deep sea captain he previously employed on his yacht. I was amused because Don was an expert at sailing and needed no help from anyone.

We also enjoyed a weekend on Catalina Island complete with a chance to do some diving in the harbour and some deep-sea fishing. We didn't catch anything, which the charter captain blamed on the season being too early! To get there and back Howard took a DC-3 and crew from TWA and made it our private aircraft, going and coming.

I saw my first flying fish in the harbour on Catalina. It was weird watching them sail through the air and sometimes over the small boats.

In the latter part of May, Don received a phone call from Howard who explained that due to some court cases coming up he would be unable to fly with us for about a month. He knew that Don was fretting about being away from Malton too long. However, Don told Howard that he was thinking of bringing his family down for a holiday. Howard said "Great. How about Bill?" Don informed him that I was married with no family, so Howard said that I should get my wife to come down also and that he would pay all expenses for both of us. He told Don to phone Fred Smye and have him arrange to get everyone down here and send him the bills. As an after thought he said, "Don't phone" til after 6:00 p.m. and get the night rates!"

He didn't worry about spending some thousands of dollars, but he did have concern about the phone bill! When the guests arrived one of the office guys took us around to find living quarters outside the hotel. Audrey and I settled for a small apartment in Beverly Hills and Don and June settled into a small ranch in one of the valleys.

They stayed for around three months then returned to Canada.

They particularly appreciated the visit with Robert Mitchum and the trip to Catalina. Don and I both had company cars with credit cards for gas so travel was extensive. One of the nicest spots was up the coast to the red wood forest.

One of the flights made during this time was a trip to Tucson, Arizona where Howard had a factory manufacturing items for space travel.

Don and I had an interesting tour of the plant while Howard conversed with the factory manager. While I was getting the aircraft fueled for the return trip a young couple came out to see the Canadian plane. It turned out that they came from Galt, Ontario and had graduated from the same high school I had attended! Small world!

On September 23, 1952 we made our last flight with Howard. Two days later we got the word to return home. It was great to be going home but we were spoiled as far as working again was concerned. However, I checked the aircraft and topped up the fuel because one place you don't want any fuel problems is flying over the Rockies. Even looking down on them from 30,000 feet they are an imposing sight. We left for Denver the next day and stayed overnight, just long enough to enjoy the good coffee and the delicious steaks in the "mile-high city." Next day we headed for Toronto, cleared customs and parked the aircraft outside the hangar. We knew that the future was very iffy for the Jetliner and we were a little sad for what was a magnificent airplane.

I recently received a letter from a long time friend, Fred Matthews. He reminded me of the things we had achieved with the Jetliner:

1. It was the first jet transport in North America. It first flew on August 10, 1949; eight years before the first American jet transport Boeing 707-120.
2. It was the first regional airliner. It flew 16 years before its first U.S. counterpart, the McDonnell Douglas DC9 first entered airline service.
3. It was the first jet transport to land at over 20 airports in Canada and the U.S.A.
4. It introduced a number of advanced technologies for transport aircraft including anti-skid brakes, 75st hi-strength aluminum alloy, electrically heated windscreens, and a full de-icing system developed by Canada's National Research Council in Ottawa. It used the vented cabin window design of Cornell University to prevent catastrophic explosive decompression as experienced by the de Havilland Comet.
5. At that period of time military jet pilots were used to juggling throttles to avoid hot starts. They were amazed that you just pushed the start button to start a Jetliner engine.

This ended my Jetliner days and I transferred over to supervisory duties in the experimental hangar. It was not long before we had to prepare for the first Avro Arrow and I was offered the job of preparing for this and being in charge of maintenance, reporting directly to the Experimental Manager. I accepted, but this all ended on Black Friday and I was left with nothing but memories of two of the finest aircraft ever built!