

This month John salutes the great Zura and comments on aviation industry problems present and past

■ JOHN MAYNARD

After training at the de Havilland Aeronautical Technical School in 1949–53, John served as a Pilot Officer in the RAF during his National Service. He returned to de Havilland in 1955, and in 1969 he joined BAC. He left the aircraft industry in 1973, but has continued to nourish his enthusiasm for British aviation ever since

RIGHT The CF-105 Arrow model at Barry's Bay, Ontario. **BELOW** Zura about to board a CF-100. His career was the subject of a three-part biography in *Aeroplane* in January–March 2002.



Asides — and broadsides — from the wings, with JOHN MAYNARD

Crosswind

JAN ZURAKOWSKI died at his home in Canada, Barry's Bay, on February 9, aged 89. Born in Russia to Polish parents in 1914, he joined the Polish Air Force aged 20. Becoming a fighter pilot, he fought in the desperate defence of his country following Hitler's barbarous attack in 1939 and managed to escape to England when defeat became inevitable. Joining the Royal Air Force, he fought with distinction as a member of 609 Squadron during the Battle of Britain and, for the remainder of the war, served as an instructor at various OTUs, as CO of 316 Sqn, at Fighter Command Headquarters, and finally as a student on an early ETPS course.

Soon after the war Zura became a test pilot at the A&AEE at Boscombe Down as a squadron leader. He left the RAF and in 1950 joined Gloster, test-flying Meteors. He emigrated to Canada in 1952, where he was to become chief test pilot for Avro Canada.

Zura now entered the high time of his life, in which his consummate flying skills were employed at the forefront of Canada's brilliant aircraft industry. He contributed much to the Avro CF-100 fighter, once taking it faster than sound in a long steep dive, to the amazement of the experts. But this was the man who performed an immaculate falling leaf in the Martin Baker M.B.5 fighter at an early post-war Farnborough display which I witnessed, and the amazing cartwheel in a vertically climbing Meteor by simply (?) cutting the power on one engine.

Following the CF-100, Avro Canada next produced the magnificent CF-105 Arrow, first flown by Zura in March 1958. This very advanced Mach 2 all-weather fighter was a tremendous credit to the Canadian industry. It had a continental radius of action and could operate up to 70,000ft. It achieved 1,000 m.p.h. on its seventh flight and was widely acknowledged as a masterpiece; so we should perhaps not be surprised that it was cancelled by John Diefenbaker, a Prime Minister of Canada, possessed of unusual incompetence even in that office. The prototype and six more

airframes were sliced up, crushed and burned. Such was Zura's sense of betrayal that he vowed he would never fly again, and he never did. He retired to Barry's Bay, building boats and contentment with his wife Anne, whom he had been forced to leave in Poland in 1939, returning to marry her six years later.

In 1973 Zura was inducted into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame and in 1997 was named a Pioneer of Canadian Aviation. In 2000 the Flight Test Centre building at Cold Lake, Alberta, was renamed in his honour. He would have foregone all recognition for the realisation of his dream to see the Arrow in Canadian, even Nato, service. This gentle, modest man was once asked what it was like to fly faster than sound: "It's just like flying slowly," he replied, "only quicker"! A beautiful scale model Arrow soars over the park and gardens that bear his name in Barry's Bay.

HOW ON EARTH did we arrive at a situation where the Eurofighter Typhoon and the Nimrod 4 are now respectively 4.5 years and 6.9 years late and £2.3 billion and £400 million over budget? Are we really so bereft in our ability to manage or control such projects that time and money just pour away like water through a colander? I suggest the difficulties imposed by the international production of the Eurofighter, and the uncertainties surrounding its mission and its final order book, are the origin of all its difficulties.

On the other hand, Nimrod 4 is simply a British disaster. A potentially fine aeroplane has been subjected to sheer lunacy. Whoever determined to cobble it together out of old and new parts, or to shift its construction from one factory to another at least twice, needs to have his or her head read. Flying fuselages between establishments in vast Russian transport aircraft was the climactic, bizarre manifestation of a disastrously conceived project. Of course I sympathise with BAE Systems and recognise its huge abilities, and I also understand how vital to its future every order must be. Nevertheless, the time must come when it prices itself out of the air defence market. Maybe it does not care too much because of the huge success of Airbus, for whom it produces wings. What a tragic end to a partnership between industry and defence which conceived and built war-winning projects.

BAE SYSTEMS' problems remind me of a cautionary tale from my time at Weybridge, about 1966, when work in the assembly halls, once full of Valiants, consisted of a few Concorde bits and some Pembroke being resparred. Talking to factory manager Bill Beavington, I mused on how the workshops might be filled and redundancy avoided. "Well," said Bill, "I suppose we could always make bikes." I did my famous double-take, but he continued: "They would of course be the finest, most reliable and long-lasting on the market. Every new device and safety measure would be included and the world would beat a path to our door." He paused: "Mind you, customers would have to wait six years to get one and they'd cost £100,000 each!" There is a moral there somewhere which we would do well to keep in mind.

