



End of an era? Vulcan B.2 XH558 touches down at Bruntingthorpe, March 23, 1993; since then it has been lovingly cared for against the day when it returns to the sky. (FP - Duncan Cubitt)

Viable Vulcans?

Ken Ellis provides a health-check on the world Vulcan population.

IT WAS 1995 when *FlyPast* last looked at the UK Vulcan population — the December issue jingoistically ignoring the exiles in North America. Since then the population has decreased by one, but the attitudes of those committed to keeping the Mighty Delta's image alive-and-kicking have been honed and there is an atmosphere of quiet determination. We may not be able to bask in the sight and the sound of a Vulcan in the air but there is a small army out there working to make sure such a prospect is indeed a possibility.

Undeniably in 'pole position' through a combination of circumstances, facilities and timing is **XH558** — the last Vulcan to fly — cosseted by **British Aviation Heritage** at Bruntingthorpe, Leics. As these words were being formulated in early August, '558 had been pulled out of her hangar in preparation for her first engine runs of the year, due over the weekend of the 15th/16th, prior to her eagerly anticipated taxi runs during the open day on the 23rd.

It is the access to a hangar, and all of the advantages that come with that situation, that make XH558 the front runner. This is not to deny BAH's huge spares, tools and equipment holdings, or its gathered expertise — they are all well proven. The 'youngest' of the 'live' Vulcans (she last flew on March 23, 1993) is the only one kept in a controlled environment — offering her crew the luxury of working on her indoors. (While we are talking roofs-over-heads, the Duxford and Hendon Vulcans are still



Having a hangar in which to undertake servicing makes the British Aviation Heritage task of caring for XH558 much easier. (David Stephens Collection)

the only whole museum examples indoors, although there are a handful of lottery applications that may change this in the medium term.)

BAH's David Walton, describing the work that has gone on during XH558's sojourn inside the huge 'Butler' hangar — built while the USAF was in residence at the airfield — said, "it is a case of staying on top of things, lubricating and checking all the while". Ever proud of the

people who work on XH558, David was convinced that she "should be 100% serviceable" by the time the public could come and pay homage.

Another element contributing to the fortunes of XH558 has arisen since our last survey. Through the vision and determination of Colin and Sharon Mears, the Vulcan 558 Club was established in April 1997. Tragically, Sharon died last November, but the members have rallied around Colin and the club goes from strength to strength. In the aftermath of the dismal ruins of the Vulcan Association, anyone trying to set up a 'supporters' club faced a major problem of credibility in the eyes of a community that had put its heart and soul into backing the VA's

activities. Having been energetically 'networking' Vulcan owners, large and small, Colin's stature was beyond dispute and the membership increases steadily.

Down at Southend Airport can be found the **Vulcan Restoration Trust** and its charge, **XL426**. The April issue of *FlyPast* dealt with the VRT, so I'll unashamedly quote myself in summing up its aim as making sure "she remains



XH558 poses for the *FlyPast* camera — will we ever see this majestic aircraft back in the air? (FP - Duncan Cubitt)



Wellesbourne's XM655 takes to the air! After the successful fitting of a new shock absorber, a full retraction test was carried out on July 25. (Derek Powell)

Mountford's XM655, for a while looked to be in decline and facing a silent future. This is not the case and over the weekend of July 25/26 she tucked her undercarriage up and 'flew' — with the support of a quartet of jacks!

Delta Engineering used to look after XM655, but with its move to Kemble — as Delta Jets — custodianship moved to the airfield's owner, John Littler. XM655 made her first taxi run since arrival at Wellesbourne (February 11, 1984) in August 1995 thanks to a dedicated band of volunteers.

February 1997 saw the establishment of the XM655 Association and a great many hopes were pinned on this providing funds and support. As quick as it arrived, the association fizzled and it was announced that it had wound itself up on October 31.

This left XM655's future in some doubt, but thanks to John Littler's understanding and a group of die-hards led by Derek Powell, work on



XL426 at Southend is often called the 'Lady in Waiting'; the aircraft undertakes regular 'fast taxi' runs. (FP - Duncan Cubitt)

in full fettle, keeping all options open". Regularly ground run and taxied, the ever-growing VRT membership has established an enviable infrastructure to keep '426 'live'.

The VRT is not unhappy to have XL426 described as the 'Lady in Waiting' and maintains close relations with BAH so that the pool of knowledge, experience, determination, spares and tools is kept as large as possible. This co-operation can be found across the whole Vulcan community — such is the combined drive to at least keep Vulcans rolling, but ideally, flying.

VRT has inaugurated a hangar appeal with a realistic 'stock' industrial single-span unit being the target. The exact site at Southend Airport is still under evaluation. Nobody at VRT is under any illusions as to how big a task this will be, but to plunder the April article again, this is "no dream... these people mean it".

The other regular 'runner', Wellesbourne



B.2 XL391 'guards' the Blackpool Air Centre hangar at Blackpool's Airport. (FP - Duncan Cubitt)

XM655 started up again during the winter of 1997 and has continued — to great effect. All routine servicing was completed and two undercarriage doors were fabricated to replace badly corroded examples.

A goal was set of a taxi run for June 7 and all looked fair. Then, with a month to go, the shock absorber on the starboard main undercarriage failed. Not only did this involve the sourcing of a serviceable 'shock', it also required the not inconsiderable jacking of the whole aircraft.

The Vulcan 'community' swung into gear. VRT supplied a shock absorber in exchange for brake parachutes. BAH at Bruntingthorpe loaned two of the huge jacks, Delta Jets another two, and the Newark Air Museum supplied missing jack parts. Derek sums up the effort, "this sort of co-operation speaks volumes for the preservation scene and our sincere thanks are extended to all."



Although the RAF removed certain items of equipment from the aircraft prior to disposal, most of the survivors now have virtually complete interiors — as evidenced here with the Midland Air Museum's XL360. (FP - Duncan Cubitt)



Flashback. Duxford's XJ824 was first delivered to the RAF in May 1961 to 27 Squadron. That unit's elephant motif adorns the fin of this early view in the white anti-flash colours. (Ken Ellis collection)

On a sweltering July 25 the failed strut was replaced and a full undercarriage retraction test was carried out to boot. XM655 briefly went 'flying'. A new taxi day for '655 is now being sorted. (Anyone wishing to be involved in looking after XM655 should contact Derek Powell on 0121 7773518.)

The table charts the survivor population and this time it includes the Vulcan 'exports', three in the USA and one in Canada. Castle's example is reported to have reached the stage of ground-running the Olympus engines — the allure of the Vulcan knows no bounds!

With the final demise of the Wales Aircraft Museum (WAM) at Cardiff Airport in January 1996, the inevitable came when B.2 XM569 was scrapped that February. Thankfully the cockpit section was saved by G&D Aviation and it is now with the Jet Age Museum, of which more anon. This was the first scrapping of a 'museum'



Still in its nuclear anti-flash white scheme, XM603 is in the care of the Avro Heritage Society at Woodford. (FP - Duncan Cubitt)



A wing for all weathers — shelter from rain or sun, perfect for a UK airshow. XM597 is resident at East Fortune with the Museum of Flight. (FP - Duncan Cubitt)

East Midlands Airport — along with the rest of the aircraft collection that was on show at the now moribund Aero Park. Planning applications and developments have put on ice hoped-for plans to resite the popular Aero Park and its aircraft elsewhere on the expanding airport.

As already mentioned, the nose of the former WAM B.2 XM569 joined the Gloucestershire Aviation Collection's Jet Age Museum at Staverton Airport, on February 6, 1997. A team led by Dick Waters, with Tim Radford and David West, are busy revitalising the interior. To date the pilot's panels have been taken out, refurbished and refitted. Several panels — including some for the 'back-seaters' have been powered up and many of the lights now function.

Other changes in the 'cockpit' world has been the acquisition of XM652 by Sue and Roy Jerman in December 1996. Unlike the rest of the prolific Welshpool collection, '652 has to live outside. Roy hopes to devise a suitable cradle for the nose section and dig a trench to facilitate easier access to the inside. This is a novel solution, otherwise a ponderously high mounting would have to be engineered.

On June 2, 1997, the nose of B.2MRR XH537 arrived at Bruntingthorpe to publicise the Vulcan XH558 Club. This was Colin Mears' second Vulcan nose, the other being the development B.1 XA903 which he cherishes at his home. During mid-1998 Colin passed XH537 on to '558 Club stalwart Paul Hartley and he is now looking after its restoration and display.

This is but a romp through recent Vulcan happenings, much work is going on with the 'statics' and with the other noses. Doubtless their turn will come the next time *FlyPast* carries out a 'health-check'.

The Vulcan remains as viable today as ever, because the type is so clearly loved and supported. While all that dynamism is harnessed to the full, the sky is the only limit!

Contact the Vulcan 558 Club through Paul Hartley, 19 Bowling Green Drive, Hook, Hants, RG27 9TZ and the Vulcan Restoration Trust through Norman Skinner, 25 Earls Hall Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS2 6PB. In both cases a large SAE will provide details of membership.

Vulcan Survivors

Whole Airframes

Serial	Other	Mk	Location/Status
XH558	G-VLCN	B.2	British Aviation Heritage, Bruntingthorpe, Leics.
XJ823	—	B.2	Tom Stoddart, Carlisle Airport, Cumbria.
XJ824	—	B.2	Imperial War Museum, Duxford, Cambs.
XL318	8733M	B.2	RAF Museum, Hendon, Gtr London.
XL319	—	B.2	North East Aircraft Museum, Sunderland, Northumberland.
XL360	—	B.2	Midland Air Museum, Coventry, Works.
XL361	—	B.2	Labrador Heritage Society, Goose Bay, Newfoundland, Canada.
XL391	—	B.2	Brian Bateson/Blackpool Air Centre, Blackpool Airport, Lancs.
XL426	G-VJET	B.2	Vulcan Restoration Trust, Southend, Essex.
XM573	—	B.2	Strategic Air Command Museum, Ashland, Nebraska, USA.
XM575	G-BLMC	B.2	East Midlands Airport Volunteers Association, East Midlands Airport, Leics.
XM594	—	B.2	Newark Air Museum, Winthorpe, Notts.
XM597	—	B.2	Museum of Flight, East Fortune, Scotland.
XM598	8778M	B.2	RAF Museum, Cosford, Shropshire.
XM603	—	B.2	Avro Heritage Society, Woodford, Gtr Manchester.
XM605	—	B.2	Castle Air Museum, Atwater, California, USA.
XM606	—	B.2	Eighth Air Force Museum, Barksdale, Louisiana, USA.
XM607	8779M	B.2	RAF Waddington, Lincs.
XM612	—	B.2	City of Norwich Aviation Museum, Norwich Airport, Norfolk.
XM655	G-VULC	B.2	John Littler, Wellesbourne Mountford, Works.

Cockpit Sections

Serial	Other	Mk	Location/Status
XA893	8591M	B.1	RAF Museum Cosford, Shropshire.
XA903	—	B.1	Colin Mears, Sidcup, Gtr London.
XA???	—	B.1	Private collector, Reigate, Surrey.
XH537	8749M	B.2MRR	Paul Hartley, Bruntingthorpe, Leics.
XH560	—	K.2	The Cockpit Collection, Rayleigh, Essex.
XH563	8744M	B.2MRR	Donald Milne, Banchory, Scotland.
XL388	8811M	B.2	Blythe Valley Aviation Collection, Walpole, Suffolk.
XL445	8750M	K.2	Blythe Valley Aviation Collection, Walpole, Suffolk.
XM569	—	B.2	Jet Age Museum, Staverton, Glos.
XM602	8771M	B.2	Avro Heritage Society, Woodford, Gtr Manchester.
XM652	—	B.2	Sue and Roy Jerman, Welshpool, Wales.



Those were the days! XM575 (now at East Midlands) coming 'over the hedge' — with a pan full of Vulcans in the background. (FP Collection)

