

# BOOK Reviews

## A View from the Hover

By John Farley

Flyer Books £22.95

John Farley's flying career began at a time when Britain was arguably the most advanced aviation nation in the world; we had lately given the jet engine to both the Americans and the Russians, we had in development the three V-bombers and their engines and we were on the road to TSR2, Concorde and the Harrier, with which Farley was to be so closely associated as a test pilot. We also had perhaps 20 companies making smaller aircraft and ten more producing engines for them. Exactly how we then managed to screw everything up so spectacularly is not the subject of this book, but it makes you wonder.

Farley began the VSTOL era flying Hawker Siddeley's P1127, the forefather of the Harrier, and if the latter can be a tad difficult, the former could be a real bitch. He survived when many did not; it's astounding now to remember that at times during the 1950s the RAF was losing more than one aircraft a day, and in 1953 there were 333 fatalities. There were 47 accidents at RAE Farnborough while Farley was training, 19 of them fatal. VSTOL was seen as the way of the future, but not by all. Farley was part of a small gang who worked hard to convince defence sceptics, politicians and money-men that the Harrier was vital to Britain's defence. In effect the Falklands War was won in those days – or it was at least not lost, as it would have been had the Harrier not been available. Keeping the programme alive at a time when the Tories' infamous 1957

White Paper consigned the manned fighter to the dustbin and Labour was cancelling TSR2 was no mean feat.

Reading Farley's fascinating life story (well worth the investment of time and money) one realises that the job of the test pilot does not begin and end with flying. Having identified an issue, the test pilot must then go around being an absolute

pain in the arse about it until something is done. He will meet inertia and obfuscation on all sides. Farley quotes Gloster's test pilot Bill Waterton, who quit his job railing at men who put greed and expediency before the lives of pilots, and the Duke of Edinburgh, who wrote that he would not have made a good test pilot because nobody likes a critic. One begins to build up a picture of the compleat test pilot, and of Farley himself; a man of extraordinary piloting skill, highly motivated, critical of others but also nakedly self-critical, a worshipper at the altar of technical truth and ready to fight anyone who traduces his religion.

Many people will know Farley for his thought-provoking columns in *Flyer* magazine, through which he applies his experiences to the benefit of GA pilots. Some of these columns form part of this book, and they are all well worth absorbing. He is highly opinionated and his views often run counter to the prevailing orthodoxy in terms of flight training and aircraft operation, but with his track record you'll be hard put to decide who's got it right, him or everybody else.

To conclude, an anecdote from the book.

Farley decided the early Harrier had insufficient lateral control authority in the hover and wanted it doubled for test purposes. This produced squeals of pain at Hawker Siddeley; the

cost of modifying the aircraft would be enormous, for safety reasons the back seat would have to retain the current controls while the front set was altered, weeks would be lost, blah blah blah. Farley announced it would be done, and what's more he was going to fly the modified aircraft that afternoon. Gasps of astonishment. How did he propose to do that?

"I'm going to hold the stick halfway down."

– Pat Malone

## Aussie Bomber Pilot

By Harl Hogan

Forgotten Titles, £9.98

This is a first for *General Aviation* – a review of an e-book, something that exists only in cyberspace but can be accessed and page-turned like the real thing on your computer. You can start reading for nothing, then when it starts to get really interesting you get a prompt to pay for it, like the death-ray stare you get from the bookseller when you linger too long at the shelf.

Pay up and continue reading – this is a great book. It starts off like very many wartime memoirs with the 'who what when where why' stuff, but there's a whole extra dimension to 'Aussie

Bomber Pilot' because it's full of understated humanity and simple but telling observation, with an emotional undercurrent

often lacking in such tales. And it has a gratifying amount of real information about the flying side – in some sections it reminded me a bit of 'Vucan 607', without the breathless bombast.

Harl Hogan was an accountant, impossibly square-jawed even for an Australian, who joined the RAAF and learned to fly in time to enjoy the whole of World War Two. Bad timing indeed; of the 120 aircrew who left Australia on his ship, a grand total of nine returned. Not all fell

victim to the Hun – there were many training accidents and near things. He recounts how one of his colleagues looped a Lancaster at Waddington but scraped the top of a hangar and was court-martialed. Hogan's very first combat sortie was against the Tirpitz, then lying at Trondheim, flying from Lossiemouth, and he eventually flew on 39 raids in the Lancaster. Writing of crossing the French coast he says:

"Squadrons took off at different times and we all prayed we wouldn't be first to reach the coast. The first over would be singled out and the anti-aircraft guns concentrated on it. As more planes arrived the anti-aircraft fire spread over a broad front, and when approaching the coast about in the middle of the raiders you would see a frighteningly beautiful sight... the tracer bullets created a vivid, multi-coloured mail curtain. Higher in the air, high-explosive shells exploded with a deep orange colour muffled in smoke. All this brilliantly silhouetted the coastline of beaches, sandhills, cliffs, bays, rivers and villages. Often, too, the Navy would be bombarding areas to try to take the gunners' minds off their jobs, and maybe a few planes were dropping incendiaries for the same reason. As we could rarely hear anything but the sound of our engines it had the innocent beauty of fireworks on the harbour on New Year's Eve."

Always happy to take a calculated risk, he enjoyed extremely low-level formation flying in the Lancaster, hugging the earth at 200 knots and pulling up at the last second to avoid hills and obstacles while staying ten feet from someone else's wingtip. His only crash came when one of the steel leading edge cable-cutters on his wing came away on take-off. He was thrown into the nose, catching his scrotum on the radio key as he flew by. The fact that he wrote this book at the urging of his children would indicate that no lasting damage was done in that regard, although he suffered back pain for the rest of his life.

His worst wartime accident happened in a high-speed head-on collision between two bicycles – he was unconscious for a week – and he had the great good fortune to be bumped from a flight from Lisbon by the actor Leslie Howard. The aircraft was shot down over the Bay of Biscay with the loss of all on board. His descriptions of how to fly the Lancaster and the Liberator are geared to a



fairly low denominator, but are fascinating nonetheless. He was an ordinary guy doing extraordinary things, and one can forgive the occasional historical error and the sometimes unpolished grammar in this human drama. You can find the book through [www.forgottentitles.com](http://www.forgottentitles.com) – *Pat Malone*

### The Helicopter Pilot's Companion

By **Helen Krasner**  
Crowood Press, £12.99  
123 pages, with colour pictures

This is an excellent book on several levels. If you're thinking of taking your first helicopter lesson, there are many things in here that it would be very useful to know before you set out. If you're already on the PPL(H) trail, you'll find everything you need to know in here, expressed in understandable, conversational terms. And if you are already a private helicopter pilot, this book will remind you of what you've forgotten – the aerodynamic whys and wherefores that you really ought to remember in detail, but which tend to slip the mind over time. The great advantage of the book is that everything is expressed in simple, straightforward terms, and unlike most aviation textbooks, it's very

readable. It even benefits from good grammar and correct spelling, and every sentence has a beginning, a middle, and an end!

Not only does it explain how to waggle the sticks and what magic keeps the machine aloft but it offers a great deal of sensible advice to the beginner. Never, ever, pay for a course up front, it says. While I've quietly said the same thing to students before, I've never read it in a textbook. Ms Krasner also voices sound opinions about such nonsense as the five hours' instrument flying requirement for helicopter pilots, which she is against. I would have gone

further, saying the requirement

killed Steve Hislop and many other pilots and the only reason it's still killing them is to avoid loss of face at the regulatory authority, but then I didn't write the book and Ms Krasner is less prone than me to put noses out of joint.

The book includes information on such arcane as building turbine hours traffic-spotting in California, mustering brumbies in the Outback, passenger briefings, mountain flying, winter flying – I thought at first blush that £12.99 was a bit steep for such a tome, especially as some of the photographs seem to be a bit of a non sequitur, but this will be a companion at my bedside, and as I will dip into it regularly and often I will always consider it money well spent. – *Pat Malone* ■



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