

# BOOK Reviews

## Cessna 172 A pocket history

By Ron Smith

Amberley Publishing, £8.99

I don't suppose I know many pilots who've never flown the ubiquitous Cessna 172, and I suspect many of them share my wholehearted regard for the aircraft; I've done things in a 172 that I didn't realise were really stupid until later, and I'm still alive (at time of writing). Ron Smith loved the old beast enough to sit down and compile this engaging and comprehensive pocket history, and his twin brother Jim seems to have travelled the world taking pictures of 172s from Melbourne to Manchester via Wichita. Perhaps it runs in the family.

The book traces the origins of the 172 from the post-war flying boom in America, when pilots trained under the GI Bill began to need four seats rather than two. It's fascinating to look at the relative sales figures and to wonder how some of those companies survived and thrived while others vanished without trace. Here are the production figures from July 1946: Piper 883, Aeronca 860, Cessna 551, Ercoupe 483, Taylorcraft 310, Luscombe 255, Globe Swift 140. The 172 first flew in the middle of 1955, and it wasn't really best at anything – it wasn't the fastest, the biggest, it didn't have the shortest take-off or the greatest range, but it was pretty good at all these things and more, and above all it was docile and benign. In the beginning Cessna updated the 172 every year and it was given a swept fin, wrap-around windows, engine changes, electric flaps and other refinements. Later models ran over several years – the 172M ran from 1973 to 1976 and 6,825 were built, plus 610 more under licence in France.

Rapacious lawyers and greedy clients drove product liability insurance so high that the market for light singles was staggered, and Cessna stopped production in 1986. Many thought that would be the end of it, but Bill Clinton's hard-fought GA Revitalisation Act limited



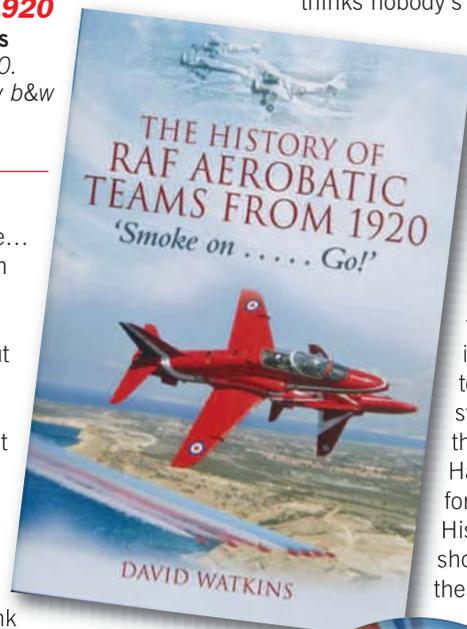
product liability to 18 years from manufacture and Cessna restarted the line after a ten-year gap. Within three years they had sold another 1,000 172s. Today the aircraft benefits from modern stuff like the Garmin 1000 glass cockpit, but outside it's clearly the offspring of its forebears. Not many aircraft are still in production after 55 years, and the 172 still doesn't do anything better than everybody else, it just does everything very well. The book sets out AOPA Flight Safety Foundation figures which show the 172s safety rate in a favourable light, and looks at some of the derivatives, conversions and one-offs it has spawned; would you believe there was once a twin-engined 172, designed to have two engines under the cowling driving a combining gearbox? It says so here, anyway. – Pat Malone

## Smoke on... Go! The history of RAF aerobatic teams from 1920

By David Watkins

Pen & Sword, £30.  
475 pages, many b&w photos and a few colour plates

Speaking of labours of love... here's a book with as much mass market appeal as the AV debate, but those of us who have the good fortune to like that sort of thing can only marvel at David Watkins' years of meticulous research and thank him for his efforts. Again, the extraordinary amount of detail here is breathtaking. There was a time when virtually every squadron had its aerobatic display team, and I believe every one gets a mention here, together with the aircraft types, and the people who flew them. Formation displays were, of course, aimed at sharpening flying skills, and they are every bit as legitimate today. The book takes us back to the first RAF Aerial Pageant at Hendon in June 1920 when Camels, Brisfits and SE.5s rules the skies. Since then virtually every aircraft in the inventory has been displayed as part of a team; Gauntlets and Furies, Provosts and Lightnings, Hunters, Meteors, Vampires, Chippies, Moths and Spits, and the helicopters, Sikorsky R1s and (for shame!) three Hoverfly 2s decked out as elephants. In more recent history we've had the



Yellowjacks, the Red Pelicans, the Black Arrows and a dozen more, and then there was one – in 1966 we come to Ray Hanna and the Red Arrows, first with Gnats, now with the Hawks. Sometimes this book seemed a little over-detailed, with the names of every pilot and the registration of the aircraft he flew faithfully recorded, but if you skip those bits you've got a brilliant historical record of a time, sadly, we'll not see again. Well done, that man. – Pat Malone

...and a DVD

## Best of British: The Red Arrows

www.transair.co.uk, £9.49

Running time 63 minutes

This would make an excellent present for any youth who professes an interest in flying, or indeed for any adult pilot who makes jet noises when he thinks nobody's looking, according to his wife. Ahem. It starts and finishes with a lot of aerial ballet at the Biggin Hill Air Show, and in between there's some in-cockpit footage, ahead and astern, and air-to-air film giving unusual attitudes on familiar themes. The commentary is aimed at the non-technical, although there's still a lot to be learned – there's mention of special Hawk throttle adjustments for the Reds, not explained. History and tradition get a showing; there's footage of the Hawker Fury formation team of the 1930s and the unique 22-Hunter formation which looped and barrel rolled at Farnborough, among others. There's a special tribute, too, to Ray Hanna, the longest-service Reds leader and the man who established the Diamond Nine. It's just a little bit out of date – it talks of 'daring young men' when we know, of course, that there's a daring young lady, Kirsty Moore, in the team. The 100-strong backroom team who keep the Reds rolling, and the millions of pounds it costs, are also mentioned – personally I think that of the seven million or so public employees I help support, these nine would be the very last I would sack,



and blowing money down the jetpipe of a red Hawk is a far better use of my taxes than paying most public sector salaries. Scream on! – *Pat Malone*

### **Empire of the Clouds When Britain's Aircraft Ruled the World**

**By James Hamilton-Paterson**  
*Faber & Faber, £20 RRP*

Those of us born between 1940 and 1950 nostalgically recall the excitement of the Farnborough Air Displays of the 1950s and early 1960s. Neville Duke, Roly Falk, John Cunningham, Mike Lithgow, John Derry, Roland Beamont, to mention just a few test pilot's names that were familiar to most of the UK population, and were frequently the subjects of newspaper articles and evocative Pathe or Gaumont cinema newsreels. The very words *test pilot* and *Sound Barrier* were enough to start the pulse racing. It seemed that the whole British aviation scene in the 50s was a continuous parade of top secret aircraft that flew faster and faster and that these aircraft led the World. DH110, Swift, Sea Hawk, Hunter, Victor, Vulcan, Valiant, P1A, SR53... the list goes on and on. But within this proliferation lay many of the problems that James Hamilton-Paterson writes of in this book.

The reality was that the industry was fragmented, producing far too many designs in which handling qualities were poor, pilots' requirements and wishes were hardly considered, and for the customer (often the RAF) the design was woefully inadequate or under-developed when it entered service.

Hamilton-Paterson cites the writings and experiences of his own boyhood hero, Bill Waterton, Gloster's outspoken ex-RAF Chief Test Pilot who wrote of the wasteful inadequacies of Britain's 1950s aircraft industry in his autobiography "The Quick and the Dead" and later, in his newspaper column. In particular, Waterton was highly critical of his own firm's product of the time, the Javelin.

But despite some poor designs, much good work was still being done by the British aircraft industry, but badly considered defence reviews in 1957 and 1964 destroyed much of that. It is heartbreaking to look back and see how much aircraft design and manufacturing

capability Britain has lost, and what might have been had more rational thought been applied.

Hamilton-Paterson's prose evokes the excitement and wonder of those halcyon days as he writes so eloquently of our young ("The New Elizabethans") and naïve emotions and beliefs of the day. I found this totally absorbing. I could spot no typos (rare these days), and the author's grammatical style is spot on my taste. Highly recommended. – *Chris Royle*

### **Lifeline in Helmand RAF Battlefield Mobility In Afghanistan**

**Roger Annett**  
*Pen & Sword Aviation. 286 pages.  
Illustrated*

Roger Annett follows his *Drop Zone Borneo* and *Drop Zone Burma* with *Lifeline in Helmand*. It is a multi-faceted account of how far the RAF has come from the days of the C47 and Twin Pioneer in providing focussed support to tactical operations in remote places by day and night. He takes us seamlessly from the mood in Brize Norton's departure lounge, through the history of Afghanistan from 1500 BC to the high tempo of current operations. Writing before the deployment of the RAF Merlin Support Helicopter, Annett interviews personnel of all ranks mounting and training the Force, maintaining the Air Bridge, and deployed with the Hercules and Chinook Forces. He teases

out useful accounts of the challenges and practicalities of modern tactical air support operations mounted far from home and at extremes of altitude and temperature. There is mention of airframe cracks and sand in the engines, but overall this is a deservedly generous and up-beat view of the excellent work being done by a lot of young men and women in particularly trying circumstances. He does not overlook the invaluable contribution of the ground crew, the training system, 47 Air Dispatch Regiment and the medics. I particularly liked the chapter "Reliefs in Place" in which coal-face workers muse on whether or not they have

made a difference to the life of the indigenous peoples. He acknowledges the contribution of the staff in the HQs. If you are looking for a balanced account of the hard work of dedicated and talented individuals providing RAF Air Support to the International Security Assistance Force, then this is the book for you. The aircraft and their warlike bits are good too. Recommended. – *Simon Coy*

### **de Havilland Moths in Detail**

**By Stuart McKay**  
*Herridge & Sons, £45. Hardback, 400pp,  
lavishly illustrated*

This book claims to be the definitive history of the de Havilland Moth line, and I can't imagine anyone ever producing a more comprehensive account of the company and its

products. This has clearly been a labour of love for author Stuart McKay – if you have any regard for Moths, the book is well worth the rather hefty cover price. The amount of detail is truly astounding; who flew which aircraft where and when, what modifications and improvements were made to which aircraft, what equipment was carried in which aircraft when which record was broken. The writing is engaging and informative, and the author is a true master of his subject. If there is any question you have about the DH60 through 94, the answer is here. There are hundreds of historical photographs, most of which I hadn't seen before, but the finest photography is reserved for aircraft that are still flying – aircraft like the Puss Moth LS, in concours condition

and presented so lovingly by photographer Simon Clay that just looking at the pictures relieves stress. The Tiger Moth, of course, is a big part of the story; Tigers with bombs, on skis, on floats, with spray kits, with Lycoming engines, Tigers stacked with wings removed at Croydon after the war. A beautiful tribute to a beautiful aircraft. The book leaves you to imagine what came after – DH supersonic fighters and airliners, then forced amalgamations and slow death. But it was fabulous while it lasted. – *Evan Wilkinson* ■

