



# Chippy earns its pension

*The 65th birthday of the venerable Chipmunk is celebrated with a fly-in, as **Keith Wilson** reports (he also took most of the photos)*

The de Havilland Canada Chipmunk made its first flight at Downsview, Toronto on 22nd May 1946, with de Havilland Hatfield's test pilot Pat Fillingham at the controls. 65 years on to the day a celebration fly-in was organised by Chipmunk enthusiast Carol de Solla Atkin and the North London Flying Club's Marketing Manager Sue Hart. The North London Flying Club hosted the event at Panshanger, just a few miles from the former de Havilland manufacturing facility at Hatfield where 111 Chipmunks were built.

The Chipmunk was designed by Polish

engineer WJ Jakimiuk as an all-metal, low-wing, tandem two-place basic trainer to replace the Tiger Moth in service with the Royal Canadian Air Force. The first flight of the Chipmunk came as the Royal Air Force was looking for a replacement for its own Tiger Moth and Magister trainers, which had served throughout the war. The RAF evaluated two early Canadian-built Chipmunks (G-AJVD and G-AKDN) at Boscombe Down and requested a series of changes in order to produce the aircraft we now know as the Chipmunk T.Mk.10. The original design had been a simple aircraft, similar to the Tiger Moth, in that it had no

electrical systems – and thus no radio – and drum brakes. The RAF requirement introduced disc brakes, a 145hp Gipsy Major engine with a vacuum pump and generator, and a Fairey Reed metal propeller. In addition, in order to make the RAF Chipmunk fully aerobatic the wing root end was redesigned and a new centre section tie bar fitted.

An initial order of 740 aircraft was placed for the RAF Reserve Command and this prompted production in England, initially at Hatfield and later at Chester. Later, after ten British built aircraft had been supplied to Força Aerea Portuguesa (FAP), a licence agreement was signed for the Chipmunk T.20 to be built by OGMA, the maintenance arm of the Portuguese Air Force.

The last Chipmunk manufactured – FAP serial number 1376 manufactured by



**Left: G-AOTR won the people's vote for favourite Chipmunk**

reconnaissance sorties between 1958 and the late 1980s.

When the National Air Races were held at Southend on 20th June 1953 Pat Fillingham qualified for the King's Cup in Chipmunk G-AKDN. With his wife Sonja in the rear seat, they completed the 59.34 mile course at an average speed of 142mph and were awarded first place in the prestigious event.

The driving force behind the 65th Anniversary event, Carol de Solla Atkin, had sent invitations to all UK-based Chipmunks and a few European ones too.



Acceptances were received from 46 proud owners. Unfortunately, on the day the UK suffered very windy conditions which prevented many aircraft from departing their home bases, including the BBMF Chipmunks from Coningsby. Those aircraft that did make it to Panshanger – a total of 21 Chipmunks finally got in - suffered difficult, gusty conditions which provided some 'interesting' arrivals for the spectators.

Guest of honour was Sonja Fillingham, wife of the late Chipmunk test pilot, who presented a prize to the Chipmunk voted best at the event. Rather than being judged by just a few people, everyone at the event got to vote for their favourite Chipmunk and the prize went to Jim Wyatt's immaculate example G-AOTR. Completely restored by ARC at Duxford, the aircraft arrived at Panshanger with less than 10 hours on the clock following a two-year rebuild.

Oldest Chipmunk to attend was WB571, the 27th aircraft off the Hatfield production line. Painted in RAF silver with yellow trim and coded '34', the German-based aircraft had arrived from Spanhoe. A number of Chipmunk presentations were organised and the speakers included Chipmunk aficionado Rod Brown as well as Chipmunk Around the World expedition team members Sqn Ldr Bill Purchase, Dave Gill and Tony Cowin. The day was completed with a seven-ship Chipmunk formation fly-by organised by Robert Miller and much appreciated by the public. The colour schemes included two former Portuguese Air Force examples (one blue and the other silver), the former Prince Charles Royal Flight red example, two RAF red and white examples and a single RAF silver aircraft. The event was concluded with the cutting of two large 65th birthday cakes by Sonja Fillingham.

Special thanks must go to the Carol de Solla Atkin, Sue Hart and Haim Merkado for making the event possible. ■

OGMA – made its first flight on 20th February 1961. Chipmunk production totalled 1,283 aircraft: 217 in Canada, 111 at Hatfield, 889 at Chester and 66 in Portugal. It is estimated that around 500 examples remain airworthy, while many others are being restored.

While the Chipmunk proved an excellent training platform, it also served the RAF as a spy plane! Two Chipmunk aircraft were used in Operation Schooner and later as Operation Nylon, to gather intelligence on Warsaw Pact forces in and around the Berlin Control Zone (BCZ). The crew consisted of a pilot, who occupied the rear seat, and an observer in the front seat equipped with a hand-held camera and telephoto lens. Flying as low as 500 feet over Soviet controlled areas of the BCZ, the Chipmunk proved to be an excellent platform for clandestine photographic

Steve Teague

**Top: G-AKDN - No. 54 - Pat and Sonja Fillingham King's Cup entry in 1953**  
**Above centre: Pat and Sonja following their 1953 King's Cup win**  
**Above: Sonja Fillingham with this year's winner Jim Wyatt**  
**This photo: Chipmunk formation defied gusty conditions**

