



ABOVE In this photograph dated July 1961, the Gemini shows off its easy cabin access in front of the control tower at Bornholm, Denmark.

when I became briefly "jet-qualified" and experienced aerobatics such as I never tasted before, or since. On March 22 I flew up with Ian Macdonald, then Flt Lt Stapleton took me in hand after an appropriate briefing and kitting-out. We did 35min indoctrination, then landed at Church Fenton. On the way back I was the pilot, and found the Jet Provost a joy to handle; easy to take off and land, and very responsive in the air. How would I have fared without any previous flying experience? The "JP" was probably easier to get off the ground and land than most elementary piston-engined trainers, but in the air things happen much more quickly. There's the rub, for a u/t pilot without any previous air experience.

Sternier things awaited me, however, when I went up with Ian again to Syerston on July 18. Suitably briefed and clothed on the following day, we took off for a photographic sortie with Flt Lt Norman Clayton as my pilot, with aerobatics added, of which he was a master. None of your straightforward spins, loops and rolls. Hammerhead stalls, with the JP hanging vertically in the empty sky, and other masterly manoeuvres not in the book, were the order of the day.

Those were in XM364; then we took off again in XM457, with me (technically) as pilot, for more aerobatics, some low flying and a practice overshoot. In these sorties I felt I made a realistic acquaintance with the agile Jet Provost. When we got back to Fairoaks I considered the two days at Syerston well spent, and was grateful for the opportunities I had been given.

BELOW At Manchester Ringway on May 22, 1961, the Gemini is refuelled. Although rather a dark image, this shows the aircraft's dark-blue-and-white colour scheme with dayglo fins.



By contrast, Alastair Pugh and I used our faithful G-AKHC as a business aircraft on August 3, going up to Scotland with Anne Porteous, who made a quick visit to her family in Glasgow, and across to Northern Ireland. I cannot now recall the specific objectives of that business, apart from giving Anne the bonus of a few hours at home, but our first stop was Blackpool, and from there we flew to Prestwick, where she and Alastair disembarked. I then crossed the Irish Sea to Newtownards, returning to pick them up. Alastair took command for the return flight to Fairoaks, where we landed after 7hr 15min airborne time; a rewarding day in the air.

We were lucky that day, meteorologically, but weather plays an unavoidable part in light aircraft flying in the UK, with its unstable climate. I was sharply reminded of this on two occasions.

One was in August 1958, when Ian Macdonald and I were bound for Naval Air Station Brawdy in South Wales, where he was to photograph the FAA's Hawker Sea Hawk aerobatic team, which was going to appear in the following month's SBAC Show. We set off from Croydon, but had to land at Rhoose, Swansea, because of a cracked cylinder head. We were then airlifted to Brawdy in an Auster flown by a local pilot, R. Exelby. This meant that Ian was in position to do his photography, helicopter-borne on the airfield boundary, while the Sea Hawks swept down and up in impeccable formation, but I had to get back to Rhoose to collect the repaired Hotel Charlie.

The Royal Navy obliged magnificently, in the form of a de Havilland Vampire T.22 flown by Lt Leeson, who took me to RAF St Athan (Rhoose being unacceptable for jets), with a scintillating display of aerobatics en route. So far, so good; but when I collected one serviceable Gemini from Rhoose I had to land at Fairford Common because of unserviceable weather, and the following morning had to put down at St David's before creeping into Brawdy, which was persistently shrouded by low cloud blowing in off the sea. However, Ian and I got away from there successfully. It took us 1hr 50min to get back to Croydon, after a trip involving a lot of hassle for me, but he got some magnificent photographs of the graceful Sea Hawks.

Another occasion (or, rather, two occasions) was when I flew up to Warton, the English Electric/BAC test airfield in Lancashire, each time having with me one of the company's PR men, Alan Brothers and Trevor Tarr, in 1960 and 1961. On one of these occasions Warton was being assailed by a frontal system from the Irish Sea, with a 40kt crosswind, unacceptable for a light aircraft. But Hotel Charlie settled down carefully and comfortably on tarmac more used to the thud of Lightnings. When I flew back to Fairoaks, alone, the front had gone through, leaving behind a cloud-wracked sky with fitful gleams of sunshine filtering through. I experienced that wonderful sensation of calm and aloofness that only flying can give, and which occurs only in certain conditions such as the aftermath of a storm.

I had gone up to Squire's Gate, Blackpool, before setting course for Fairoaks (I think this had something to do with Warton being a manufacturer's airfield), and when I took off I could not help thinking of Amy Mollison leaving there on her last flight, in the Airspeed Oxford she planned