

The Forces' favourite paper

Voyager blowout



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Chief in 83 EAG fitness boost



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ROYAL AIR FORCE

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Big cat is spotted at Lossie



Bobsleigh Olympics ambition



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Angling Net gains for UKAF



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Cycling Pedal power



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Ace's high

Hit-and-run Typhoon raiders raise the stakes on Red Flag war drill



RED FLAG FIRST: Typhoons prepare for a training sortie in Nevada; inset above right, USAF aggressor squadrons provide threat PHOTOS: AS1 JAKE HOBBS

Staff Reporter
Nevada

TYPHOONS OPERATING from remote locations in Nevada and California launched hit-and-run raids against ground and air targets during the latest high-stakes war games with allies in the US.

The exercise is the first major test of the RAF's Agile Combat Employment (ACE) strategy against 'enemy' aggressor squadrons in a realistic combat environment.

RAF Air and Space chief AM Harv Smyth said: "This exercise pushes us to the limit of our capabilities.

"Getting airborne and dispersing all over Nevada and California as we continue to fight the mission gives our people experience of the fog and friction of war with dislocated Command and Control."

● Continued on p2 and p14-15

BiteSize

“This type of weaponry could revolutionise the battlespace”

Defence Minister Grant Shapps on new DragonFire laser
See p13



“Our people can experience the fog and friction of war”

AM Harv Smyth on Exercise Red Flag
See p14-15



“Nobody expected anything from us this season”

Olympic bobsleigh hopeful Cpl John Stanbridge on the Euro and World circuits
See page 28



ACE tests UK crews



RAF News

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Continued from front page
THIS YEAR'S Red Flag exercise has been extended by a week and beyond the Nevada training area to the Californian coast and a 500-mile stretch of the Pacific to hone the RAF's ability to fly and fight from austere locations.

UK crews face high-level threats from a dedicated USAF aggressor squadron and simulated surface-to-air defences.

UK pilots have flown more than 120 sorties, targeting convoys and troops on the ground, intercepting cruise missiles and fighting their way through enemy aircraft to escort US B-2 and B-52 strike bombers to their targets before landing at different locations.

Typhoon pilot Flt Lt Tom Raeburn said: "We are in the largest exercise airspace any of us have worked in before. It is a vast area of sky."

"Supported by a Voyager tanker, we are flying out 500 miles



COMBAT TEST: Typhoon pilot Flt Lt Tom Raeburn
PHOTO: ASI JASON RUSSELL

into the Pacific and fighting our way back to the coast against a high threat level from the ground and in the air.

"We have conducted some of the widest mission sets we have

seen, including defensive counter air keeping enemy fighters out of our air space, offensive counter air operations and pushing in to escort US strike bombers.

"It is a very tough exercise and

we are facing a more advanced threat than we can simulate in the UK.

"This is much closer to the actual war-fighting scenarios that we will face on operations."

This Week In History



1956 Trenchard dies

THE VISCOUNT Trenchard of Wolfeton dies at the age of 83. He is buried in the Battle of Britain Chapel at Westminster Abbey.



1944 Gnome raiders

A STRIKE force of 617 Sqn Lancasters launch a low-level raid on the Gnome and Rhone aero-engine factory in Limoges using 12,000lb Tallboy bombs.



1991 Tornado Scud mission

TORNADO GR1s use thermal imaging and laser designating pods for the first time in an attack on hardened aircraft shelters thought to house mobile Scud launchers in Western Iraq.

Extracts from *The Royal Air Force Day By Day* by Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork (The History Press)

'Foss bite

A C-17 carrying an Apache helicopter flew in to Nato's most northern airbase as UK troops prepare to take part in extreme survival training in the Arctic circle.

The RAF transporter landed at Bardufoss in Norway ahead of this year's Exercise Nordic Response, which tests frontline fighters' ability to operate in sub-zero conditions.

Operated by the Army Air Corps' 656 Sqn, the Apache will provide support to ground forces in one of the Nato calendar's most challenging war drills.

PHOTOS: KYLE HELLER



In Brief



Charity hat-trick

CHARITY CRUSADER Sgt Ian Barber is eyeing a fundraising hat-trick by taking on a trio of challenges in London.

He'll be competing in the London Marathon before taking on the 100-mile London to Essex bike ride and a two-mile Serpentine Swim for Forces charity SSAFA.

Typhoon strike on Houthi terror lairs



NIGHT RAID: RAF Typhoon takes off from Akrotiri during latest UK and US strikes against Houthi terror group. Inset above, F/A-18 prepares to launch from USS Eisenhower. Below left, RAF armourer checks Paveway IV weapon

RAF TYPHOONS destroyed Houthi sites in Yemen used to launch attacks against shipping in the Red Sea in the second night-time raids by the UK and US.

Four UK combat jets supported by two Voyager tankers took off from Akrotiri in the co-ordinated strike, which destroyed eight terrorist bases linked to attacks on merchant and military vessels in the Gulf region.

US F/A-18 Super Hornets on board the flagship US carrier USS Dwight Eisenhower, currently stationed in the Gulf, joined raids on underground weapons sites and locations used to

launch missile and drone attacks.

Typhoon crews obliterated an underground weapons bunker in a high precision Paveway IV bomb strike before obliterating other Houthi bases near the Yemen capital Sanaa during the long-range, 10-hour mission.

The raid follows a previous joint UK and US mission targeting Houthi sites near Bani in the North West of the



country, and an airfield at Abbs used to launch cruise missiles and drones.

A UK Defence spokesman said: "These precision strikes are intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities that the Houthis use to threaten global trade and the lives of innocent mariners.

"It is in response to a series of illegal, dangerous and destabilising Houthi actions since our earlier coalition strikes, including anti-ship ballistic

missile and unmanned aerial system attacks that struck two US-owned merchant vessels.

"We specifically targeted a Houthi underground storage site and locations associated with the Houthis' missile and air surveillance capabilities.

"Our aim remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea, but let us reiterate our warning to Houthi leadership: we will not hesitate to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways in the face of continued threats."

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gave us the
quality time
we needed as
a family."**

- Al Dyer



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Help is on the cards with vets' ID launch

MORE THAN two million of the UK's military veterans can now apply for a government ID card designed to improve access to health care, welfare services and a range of discounts.

The roll-out comes after a five month pilot study and the card is now available to all Forces veterans who left Service before 2018.

Veterans' Affairs Minister Johnny Mercer said: "I am committed to improving the support available to our former service personnel, whom we owe a huge debt of gratitude.

"The roll-out is a huge step forward in helping veterans to prove their service, enabling them to access support services

more easily. I would urge all veterans to apply for their veteran card and use it to access the services, such as veteran railcards and specialist healthcare, they are entitled to."

Research into veterans health revealed many struggle to get appropriate treatment due to lack of awareness of specific issues affecting their physical and mental well-being.

The ID card will also allow holders to take advantage of veterans employment schemes, guaranteeing job applicants an interview in a range of public and private sector roles.

Veteran card carriers can also use it to apply for the vets railcard

and the Defence Discount Service.

Defence welfare chiefs say local authorities and service charities will also benefit as they will not have to conduct time-consuming checks.

Defence People and Service Families Minister Andrew Murrison added: "It is essential that every veteran can quickly verify their status and easily receive the support they need and deserve.

"These veteran cards illustrate our gratitude and appreciation for those who have proudly served this country and the incredible sacrifices they have made."

● Go to: gov.uk/veteran-card



NATIONAL ROLL-OUT: Vets' ID card is available to all former Forces personnel who left before 2018

In Brief



ON TARGET: Sgt Mitchell receives award from HM King Charles

Golden shot

SHARP-SHOOTER SGT Kenroy Mitchell has scooped the King's Medal after outgunning rivals on the firing range in the RAF's recent Champion Shot contest.

Sgt Mitchell clinched the title with a 15-point margin following a six day shoot-out on targets ranging from 50m to 500m.

Kenroy, who has represented the Air Force at Inter-Service and International competitions in the UK and Canada, was presented with the medal by King Charles at a ceremony at Buckingham Palace.



NO PLAIN SAILING: Above, The Rocks brave the full fury of the Atlantic as storms strike. Pictured right, in calmer waters as they close the gap on rivals

Staff Reporter

GUNNERS BIDDING to row across the Atlantic have vowed to step up the pace after lightning storms and gale force winds struck as they near the half-way mark in their 3,500-mile voyage.

The severe conditions, described as the worst in the event's history, have left the four-strong RAF Regt crew, the Atlantic Rocks, 300 miles adrift of the Atlantic Dash leaders, The Brightsides.

Cpl Gary Binns, Sgt Phil 'Gus'

Angus, Sgt Dan Martin and Cpl Justin Wallace launched from Lanzarote in the Canary Islands five weeks ago hoping to complete the voyage to Jolly Harbour in Antigua in under 50 days.

However setbacks now mean the Gunnery are likely to hit the Caribbean port in mid March, organisers say.

The team sailed into trouble at night six days after launching when their back-up generator failed, leaving them dependent on solar power.

Despite the challenging conditions team morale is high

and the RAF rowers are stepping up their pace, covering more than 60 nautical miles a day, a spokesman said.

Rocks project officer Aimee Martin added: "They have endured stormy and challenging conditions from the get-go. Organisers say they are the worst conditions that they have witnessed.

"The team have nearly 80 years of frontline military experience between them and know how to cope with changing conditions."

Speaking on social media Cpl Binns, who was injured in a bird-

strike in one of the many wildlife encounters the team have had, added: "We now have the winds with us and the waves, and they are pushing us along nicely."

Team members work in two-hour rotations during the day and three hours at night, burning more than 6,000 calories a day.

When they are not on shift the crew need to carry out regular navigation and equipment checks in the cabin and follow strict fitness measures including scrubbing the salt residue from their skin to prevent sores and infections.



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Voyager blowout

Tanker alert on Vegas war drill



EMERGENCY LANDING:
The 101 Sqn Voyager tanker lists to the right as it lands at Creech air base in Nevada. Inset above, the damaged landing gear

A UK Voyager tanker crew pulled off an emergency landing at a USAF air base after a landing gear tyre burst as they took off for a refuelling mission during high-stakes war games in Nevada.

The routine sortie refuelling coalition fighters during Exercise Red Flag turned into a real life drama as the crew stayed airborne, topping up fighter jets to pump out their 80 tonne load of aviation fuel before alanding the stricken aircraft.

A tyre on the aircraft's right side burst as the Voyager neared its 160mph take-off speed at Nellis air base. Once airborne, warning lights alerted the crew who used the tankers' external cameras to assess the damage.

The Captain also called in a USAF F-16 pilot taking part in the multi-national air

combat training mission to fly alongside to carry out a visual check.

After alerting fire rescue teams on the ground, the 101 Sqn Voyager, which was carrying a number of Coalition personnel alongside the five crew, extended its mission to dispense as much of its fuel as possible to reduce the stress on the landing gear during landing.

Air chiefs ordered UK Typhoons and US F-16s and F-35s taking part to land first before clearing the Voyager tanker to make an approach.

101 Sqn cabin supervisor Cpl Jaz



Lawton said: "This was my first flight in charge of the cabin with passengers onboard. It was a shock to learn that the tyre had burst, but my training kicked in and I worked with the pilots and other crew to keep the passengers updated and reassure them."

RAF engineers worked through the night to replace the wheels, ensuring the Voyager could continue refuelling duties the following day.

The 101 Sqn Captain added: "It was an eventful day, but it is reassuring to be part of a wider team that operates so effectively under pressure."

In Brief

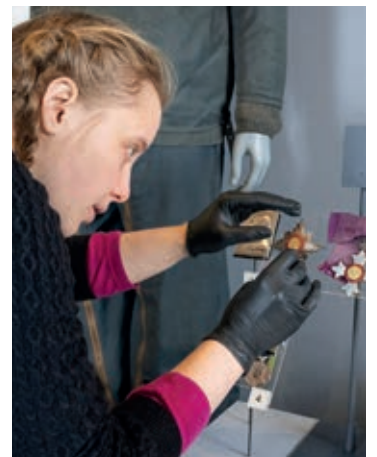


Lightning Texas trip

DEPUTY CHIEF of the Air Staff, AM Paul Lloyd, visited Air Force Plant 4, the aerospace facility in Fort Worth, Texas where UK F-35B Lightnings are manufactured.

The fifth-generation stealth fighters are assembled on a mile long production line at the high-tech Lockheed facility.

The programme is supported by UK aerospace firms with an estimated 200 contracts worth over \$75 billion to the British economy over the life of the aircraft.



Dress to impress for Stalag heroes



FORCES CHARITY SSAFA has launched a stylish polo-shirt to mark the 80th anniversary of the legendary breakout from the Nazis' notorious Stalag Luft III PoW camp.

The limited edition kit features the names of all 76 of the Allied airmen who tunnelled out of the Zagan camp in Poland in March 1944.

A spokesman for SSAFA said: "March marks the 80th anniversary of the ambitious

and audacious mass escape from Stalag Luft III of 76 Allied airmen though the Harry tunnel and SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, is marking this event.

"We produced a polo shirt that remembers all 76, including the names of The Fifty murdered on Hitler's orders.

"Proceeds from sales of this unique item will fund life-changing and life-saving work supporting generations of servicemen and women, veterans, and their families from all three services."



Up close & personnel

AN EXHIBITION telling the story of the inter-war years through the personal items of the RAF's pioneering aviators has been launched by the RAF Museum.

The *Higher, Faster, Further* display tells the story of the Service from 1920 to 1939 as it established itself as an independent air force, using new technology to break records and become a global fighting force during a time of dramatic social and political change.



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FAMILY FUN: Duxford launches £1.5 million play area

Duxford revamp

THE IMPERIAL War Museum at Duxford is set for a £1.5 million revamp to make the venue more appealing to families.

Museum bosses have called in landscape experts to double the size of the current family areas and create the new Weston Play Zone, featuring aviation-themed equipment including climbing frames, swings, slides and trampolines, as part of the site's 10-year upgrade programme.

Sir Guy Weston, chairman of the Garfield Weston Foundation funding the scheme, said: "We hope the new facilities will encourage more families to experience the special history and collections at Duxford and to explore the extraordinary human stories of conflict for many years to come."



Italian job



Air chiefs sign Typhoon and F-35 servicing pact



Staff Reporter

UK FIGHTER jets are to be serviced by Italian Air Force technicians under the latest Defence pact signed by the two countries.

Under the reciprocal agreement announced this month, RAF Typhoon and Lightning engineers will also perform cross-maintenance and servicing on the IAF's Eurofighters, F-35s and shared weapons systems during exercises and air policing missions, from 2025.

Italy recently signed an international treaty with the UK and Japan to develop the supersonic sixth-generation Tempest fighter jet in the UK.

The latest move is part of Nato's bid to develop Agile Combat Employment tactics to enable fighter crews to operate from remote areas to avoid detection by enemy missile systems.

The pact was signed by RAF Support Director AVM Shaun Harris and his Italian counterpart, Gen Michele Oballa, at Amendola Air Base.

AVM Harris said: "Our ability to interoperate on the ground, providing engineering support to Nato partners, is enhancing the agility and speed of response of our combat air forces."

"This important agreement with Italian Air Force colleagues will strengthen



Typhoon and F-35 interoperability and lay the foundations for Global Combat Air Programme cross-servicing."

'Your country needs you' CGS tells conference



UK ARMY chief Sir Patrick Sanders says if Nato goes to war with Russia, British citizens could be given military training and kit and be ready for mobilisation.

Calling for a shift in the public mindset, the Chief of the General Staff said in the event of war the UK population would be needed to defend the country against enemy forces.

His comments, at a military conference, come as more than 20,000 British personnel are

deployed across Europe and the High North to take part in Nato's biggest military drill since the height of the Cold War.

Sir Patrick said: "We must be able to credibly fight and win wars on land."

"We need an Army designed to expand rapidly to enable the first echelon, resource the second echelon and train and equip the citizen army that must follow."

"Our friends in eastern and northern Europe, who feel the proximity of the Russian threat more acutely, are already acting

prudently, laying the foundations for national mobilisation.

"Taking preparatory steps to enable placing our societies on a war footing when needed are now not merely desirable but essential."

"We will not be immune and as the pre-war generation we must similarly prepare – and that is a whole-of-nation undertaking. Ukraine brutally illustrates that regular armies start wars. Citizen armies win them."

The MoD says it has no plans for a return to national service.



Jobs boost

PERSONNEL LEAVING the military are to receive more support for finding jobs in civilian life thanks to a new contract between the Ministry of Defence and employment agency Reed.

Under the deal the number of courses for service leavers will be doubled and include tuition on the latest IT roles, including cyber security.



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Hot shot

DragonFire laser blasts drone in UK weapons trial first



Staff Reporter

UK DEFENCE scientists have carried out the first high power laser strike against an aerial target during ground-breaking weapons tests.

The land-based DragonFire laser was used to attack a drone target during test firing on the MoD's weapons range in the Hebrides.

Still under development, the system is designed to cut through its target causing structural failure and destroying explosive weapons.

Dragonfire can strike any targets within visible range at the speed of light and can hit an object the size of a pound coin one kilometre away, a spokesman said.

The laser weapon is the result of a £100 million joint investment by the MoD's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and industry partners MBDA, Leonardo and QinetiQ.

Firing it for 10 seconds is the cost equivalent of using a regular heater for just an hour, giving it the potential to become a low-cost alternative to conventional weapons.

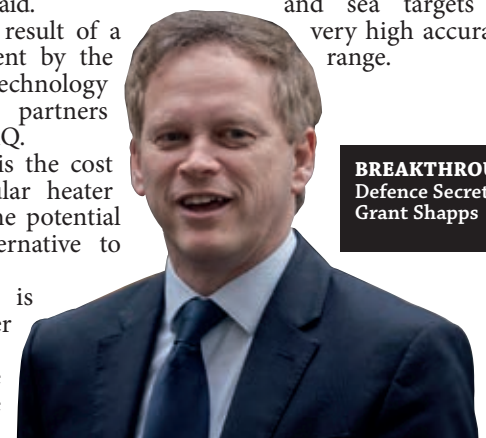
Operating the laser is typically less than £10 per shot, the MoD says.

It is hoped the cutting-edge weapon can reduce reliance on traditional ammunition.

Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps said: "This type of cutting-edge weaponry has the potential to revolutionise the battlespace by reducing the reliance on expensive ammunition, while also lowering the risk of collateral damage."

"Investments with industry partners in advanced technologies like DragonFire are crucial in a highly-contested world, helping us maintain the battle-winning edge and keep the nation safe."

The latest milestone builds on a series of highly successful trials, including the first static high-power laser firing of a sovereign UK capability and demonstration of the DragonFire system's ability to track moving air and sea targets with very high accuracy at range.



BREAKTHROUGH:
Defence Secretary
Grant Shapps

2024: a significant challenge ahead...

IN A New year statement Neil Marshall, CEO of the Forces Pension Society said: "One of the most significant pension challenges in the year ahead concerns the implementation of the AFPS15 Remedy (McCloud).

Many of those serving, are in-scope for the Remedy* and are uncertain about how the issue will be resolved for them. Significant numbers of Members joining us in the past twelve months have told us their concern about understanding the process of the Remedy and, more importantly, how it will impact them personally.

"In response to the first concern, we have developed a visual guide to describe the Remedy journey and how to determine your eligibility. The guide appears alongside this statement.

"As for the critical question of how to help you make the best choice between your legacy scheme benefits and AFPS15, that's where the Society and its Forces Pensions Consultants really come into their own.

"Everyone's needs and personal circumstances are different so it's unwise to generalise. We approach every pension enquiry on a bespoke basis. Our pensions experts provide guidance based on each individual's circumstances. Only in that way can people make the choices that best meet their needs. And we stand ready to support our Members



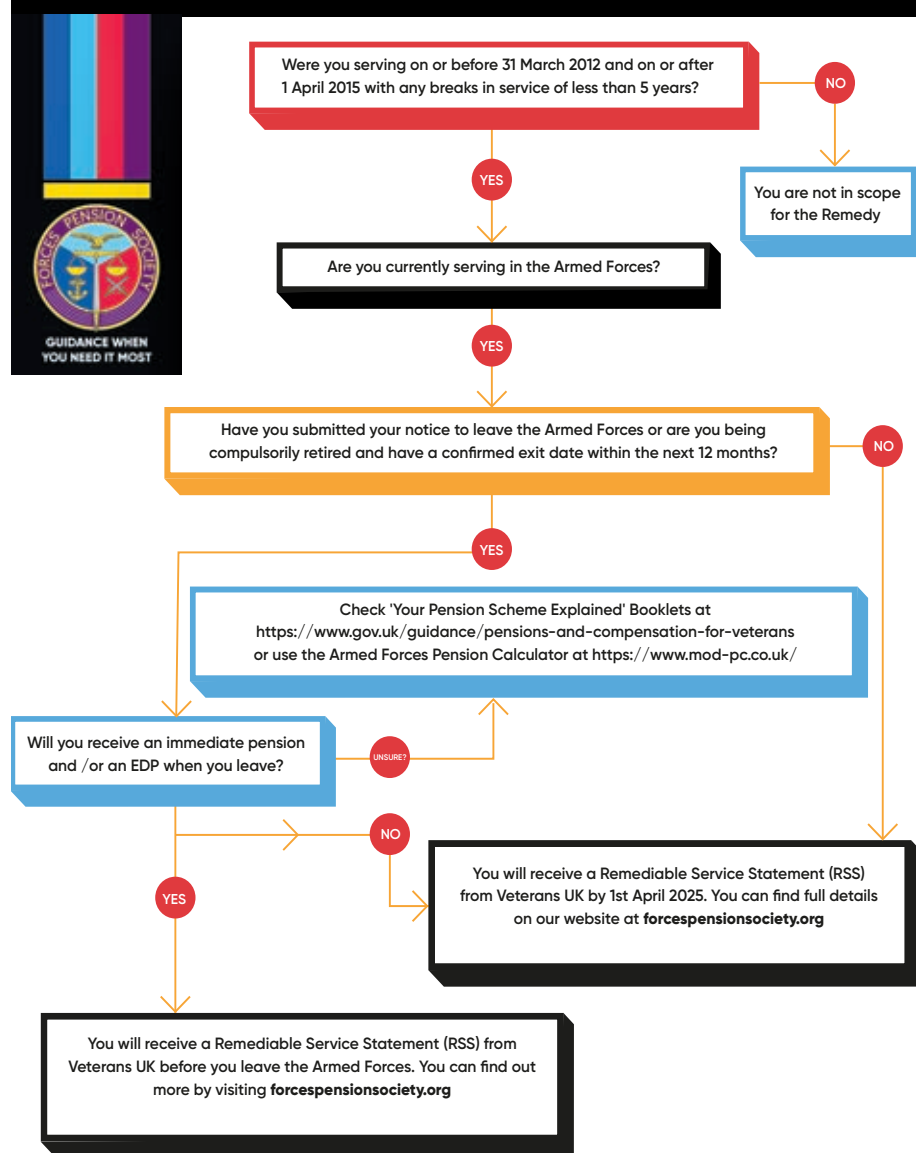
● Neil Marshall, CEO, Forces Pension Society

throughout the year ahead."

*Armed Forces personnel who were in service both on or before 31st March 2012, and on or after 1st April 2015, with any break in service of less than 5 years.

FPS is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that serves the whole military community as a pension watchdog. If you would like to know about the Forces Pension Society's work, read the latest AFPS15 SITREP, and find out how to become a Member, visit forcespensionsociety.org

The Forces Pension Society Eligibility Guide (for those serving) to the AFPS15 Remedy



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Rep it up

Engineer Jonno keeping Coalition forces fighting fit on Gulf frontline

GULF-BASED ENGINEER Wg Cdr Jonno Johnson is keeping coalition troops fighting fit by putting them through their paces with a month-long workout fundraiser to support a UK charity for the terminally ill.

More than 100 UK and US personnel have signed up for the challenge organised by the RAF's 83 Expeditionary Air Group Chief of Staff, to complete 83 'reps' a day.

Engineering ace Jonno, who is also a qualified fitness and nutrition coach, launched the health drive to raise funds for UK-based charity the Ebi Foundation, set up by 83 EAG's Chf Tech Darren Bunn, who's daughter Eboni died at the age of 19 from the rare neurodegenerative condition Friedrich's Ataxia.

Wg Cdr Johnson said: "Health and fitness are vitally important for personnel when they are deployed on operations, maintaining physical health promotes positive mental health and supports the moral component of fighting power, resulting in performance of duties being much more effective."

"Using my PT skills, it was obvious



CHALLENGE: Coalition personnel hit the exercise ground to complete gruelling daily RAF work-out



CHF TECH BUNN

I could make a difference to everyone deployed and we could all have a bit of fun and also make some money for charity."

Set up last year, the Ebi Foundation has already paid out £1,500 for a generator for a youngster who requires around the clock oxygen and £1,000 towards the cost of a wheelchair to allow a woman with Cauda Equina Syndrome and spinal stenosis, to improve her mobility and quality of life.

Chf Tech Bunn said: "After my daughter Eboni died, her last wish was that a charity was set up to help people in the same situation that she had been in."

"As I have been raising funds for many years, I thought I must set up the foundation to make her last wish come true. With the help of my sons, it is what we have actually done now."

"From a family perspective, we want to give back and acknowledge the help we all received during Eboni's life by helping others who are going through what we did."

Parachute penguin Percy heads appeal

RAF MUSEUM chiefs have recruited WWII bomber mascot Percy the Penguin to lead their latest fundraising drive.

The famous figure was carried by Flt Lt Stan Chapman when he and his crew successfully bailed out after their Halifax was downed during a raid over Berlin in February, 1944.

Now the home-made good-luck charm has been mobilised to recruit volunteers for the museum's Operation Percy fun run challenge to complete 80km by the end of February – to mark the 80th anniversary of Stan's lucky escape.

RAF Museum fundraising chief Sophie Wallace said: "Support and fundraising from challengers will help the RAF Museum keep stories like Stan and Percy's alive and shared for



WWII MISSION: WWII hero Stan Chapman bailed from Halifax during a bombing raid over Berlin in 1944

many years to come. Challenges like this are a great way for us to share some of the more unknown stories of the RAF, while raising vital funds."

Participants can take part in the virtual challenge anywhere in the world, and run, walk, cycle or swim the distance. Entry is £20 per person.



US JET boost

US DEFENCE giant Northrop Grumman has pledged to continue its support for the Jon Egging Trust's Blue Skies youth programme.

The charity, set up in memory of Red Arrows pilot Flt Lt Jon Egging, provides support to disadvantaged students interested in working in the aerospace industry.

JET chief Emma Egging said: "Northrop Grumman have become one of our key corporate partners, supporting us with direct funding without which we would not be able to deliver our support programmes."

Feature



Agile Combat Employment the key IN THE PACK...



AIR FORCE crews honing their combat skills in the latest peer-on-peer Red Flag war games in the US are testing their Agile Combat Employment (ACE) ability on the big stage in Nevada and California.

Flying simulated strike missions against USAF aggressor squadrons in the vast desert training range, Typhoon and Voyager tanker crews are launching raids on 'enemy' targets from dispersed locations.

It's the first major test of the ACE concept in realistic combat conditions against high volume fourth and fifth-generation fighters, as air chiefs step up the drive to increase combat capability.

This year's Red Flag drill has been extended by a week and beyond the Nellis training area to neighbouring California.

In a high-tech game of hide and seek, fighter crews under the direction of senior commanders operate from remote locations to avoid detection from their adversaries.

“If we only operate from a single base it won't take long for an adversary to deny that capability to us”

RAF Air and Space Commander Air Marshal Harv Smyth said: “If we only operate from a single base it won't take long for an adversary to deny that capability to us.”

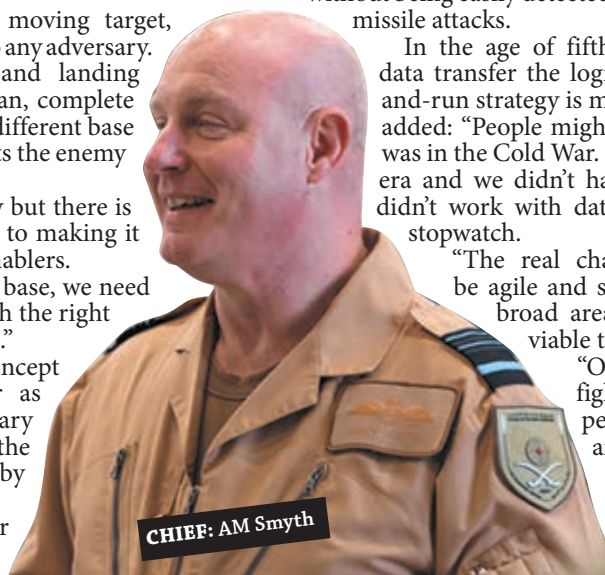
“Effectively we become a moving target, which is presenting problems to any adversary. Taking off from one base and landing somewhere else to refuel, replan, complete another mission and land at a different base with agility and fluidity presents the enemy with difficult dilemmas.

“We are on an ACE journey but there is still a long way to go. The key to making it work is putting the focus on enablers.

“Operating from an austere base, we need to work out how to survive with the right life-support, weapons and data.”

The origins of the ACE concept date back to the Cold War as Swedish and Finnish military chiefs planned how to combat the ever-present threat of invasion by vastly superior Soviet forces.

By constantly moving fighter jets supported by small teams



RED FLAG TYPHOON: Huge war games enable RAF aircraft and personnel to operate from dispersed locations

of engineers they would be able to effectively strike back without being easily detected and destroyed by enemy missile attacks.

In the age of fifth-generation high speed data transfer the logistics of operating a hit-and-run strategy is more complex. AM Smyth added: “People might think this is just like it was in the Cold War. I joined at the end of that era and we didn't have iPhones and aircraft didn't work with data – it was all map and stopwatch.

“The real challenge now is how to be agile and spread the force across a broad area but still feed it so it's viable to fight.

“Our mantra is to fly and fight but we need to feed our people the fuel, weapons and data they need.

“This exercise pushes us to the limit of our capabilities. We are here with Typhoon

equipped with Meteor, the best air-to-air missile, and being able to work on how to integrate that with the US F-35s shows us that our overall capability is greater than the sum of the parts.

“Getting airborne and dispersing all over Nevada and California as we continue to fight the mission gives our people experience of the fog and friction of war with dislocated Command and Control.”

The Red Flag test follows smaller-scale exercises across the UK and Europe and with Nato partners in Europe. Typhoons joined French Air Force Rafale and US F-35s last year in a simulated air base attack.

In another first for the RAF, Coningsby-based 41 Sqn jets launched training sorties from a public road in the remote Tervo region in Finland during Exercise Baana.

Specialist teams from two RAF units have also been developing the capability of the Atlas transport aircraft to refuel fast jets. Fuel is transferred into a tactical refuelling facility to provide support to aircraft forward deployed to remote locations.

AM Smyth added: “We are going to see more exercises taking on this concept. I have been clear as we build the exercise programme that each one must have an ACE element.”

Key to maintaining Air Power in modern warfare



NEW COLD WAR: Air Force personnel fuel the fight in freezing temperatures in Norway during Exercise Arctic Phoenix ACE manoeuvres
PHOTO: SGT CATHY SHARPLES (RAuxAF)



CHECKS: RAF engineer works on Typhoon in Finland during Exercise Baana



UN-FINNISH-ED BUSINESS: RAF Typhoon takes off from a road for the first time during Exercise Baana in Finland last year and, *inset right*, Royal Norwegian Air Force F-35 also takes part in Agile Combat Employment practice
PHOTOS: AS1 TOMAS BARNARD



Royal Air Force In Concert

Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the RAF Music Charitable Trust

Lincoln Cathedral

7.30pm Saturday 11 May 2024

Compere: Melvyn Prior



Royal Hall, Harrogate

7.30pm Friday 28 June 2024

Compere: Howard Leader



Watersmeet, Rickmansworth

Royal Air Force Squadronaires

7.30pm Friday 15 March 2024

CAST, Doncaster

Band of the Royal Air Force College

7.30pm Thursday 19 September 2024

Palace Theatre, Newark

Band of the Royal Air Force College

7.30pm Friday 20 September 2024

Playhouse, Weston Super Mare

Central Band of the Royal Air Force

7.30pm Friday 27 September 2024

Assembly Hall, Worthing

Band of the Royal Air Force Regiment

3.00pm Sunday 29 September 2024

West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge

Band of the Royal Air Force Regiment

7.30pm Friday 4 October 2024

The Bands play by permission of the Air Force Board of the Defence Council



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Jaguar XX119 helps 6 Squadron to celebrate landmark

Lossie's big cat spotted

A DISTINCTIVE Jaguar aircraft was unveiled at its new home in Lossiemouth as one of the Royal Air Force's oldest squadrons celebrated its 110th anniversary.

Jaguar XX119, dubbed 'Spotty' because of its unique big cat paint scheme, is now on display alongside the squadron's MacRoberts Fighter Typhoon – 'Sir Roderic'.

The Lossiemouth-based 6 Sqn was the last to fly Spotty before the aircraft's retirement in 2007.

The airframe was transferred to the Moray station from RAF Cosford, where it was used to train technicians, and will now take pride of place in the 6 Sqn hangar.

“As the last squadron to operate XX119, she holds a special place in our hearts”

Formed on January 31, 1914, 6 Sqn proudly boasts the longest unbroken record of service of any air force squadron anywhere in the world, having remained continuously operational until 2007.

Wg Cdr Gary Montgomery, Officer

Commanding 6 Sqn, said: “Today is a chance to look back over 6 Squadron's significant operational heritage which spans over 50 years of deployed operations and significant milestones.

“From the First World War, which saw us earn the first air combat Victoria Cross, through to the Second World War, where we gained our nickname of the Flying Can Openers, and beyond, there is much for our personnel to reflect on.

“We spent 33 years operating the Jaguar

and as the last squadron to operate XX119, she holds a special place in our hearts. It is an honour to be able to unveil her as we mark our 110th anniversary.”

The squadron was reformed to fly Typhoons in 2010, serving on Operations Ellamy and Shader, and in support of Nato air policing missions.

Based overseas for 50 years, 6 Sqn earned the nickname ‘The Flying Can Openers’ for their prowess destroying Axis armour in the North African desert during the Second World War.

Their time in Jordan saw them become the only RAF squadron to have two royal standards, with the second presented by Jordan's King Abdullah I in 1950.

Proud history of 'oldest' Sqn

● FORMED in January 1914 at Farnborough, 6 Sqn operated the Royal Aircraft Factory B.E.2, the Farman and man-lifting kites and became one of the first flying units to see action in the Great War before being incorporated into the RAF in April 1918.

● During WWII 6 Sqn pilots flew the rocket-equipped Hurricane Mk.IID. It returned to the Middle East after the war and was awarded a royal standard by King Abdullah I of Jordan in recognition of its service in the region since 1919.

● The Squadron returned to the UK in 1969, where it initially flew the Phantom at RAF Coningsby before moving to Lossiemouth with the introduction of the Jaguar in 1974.

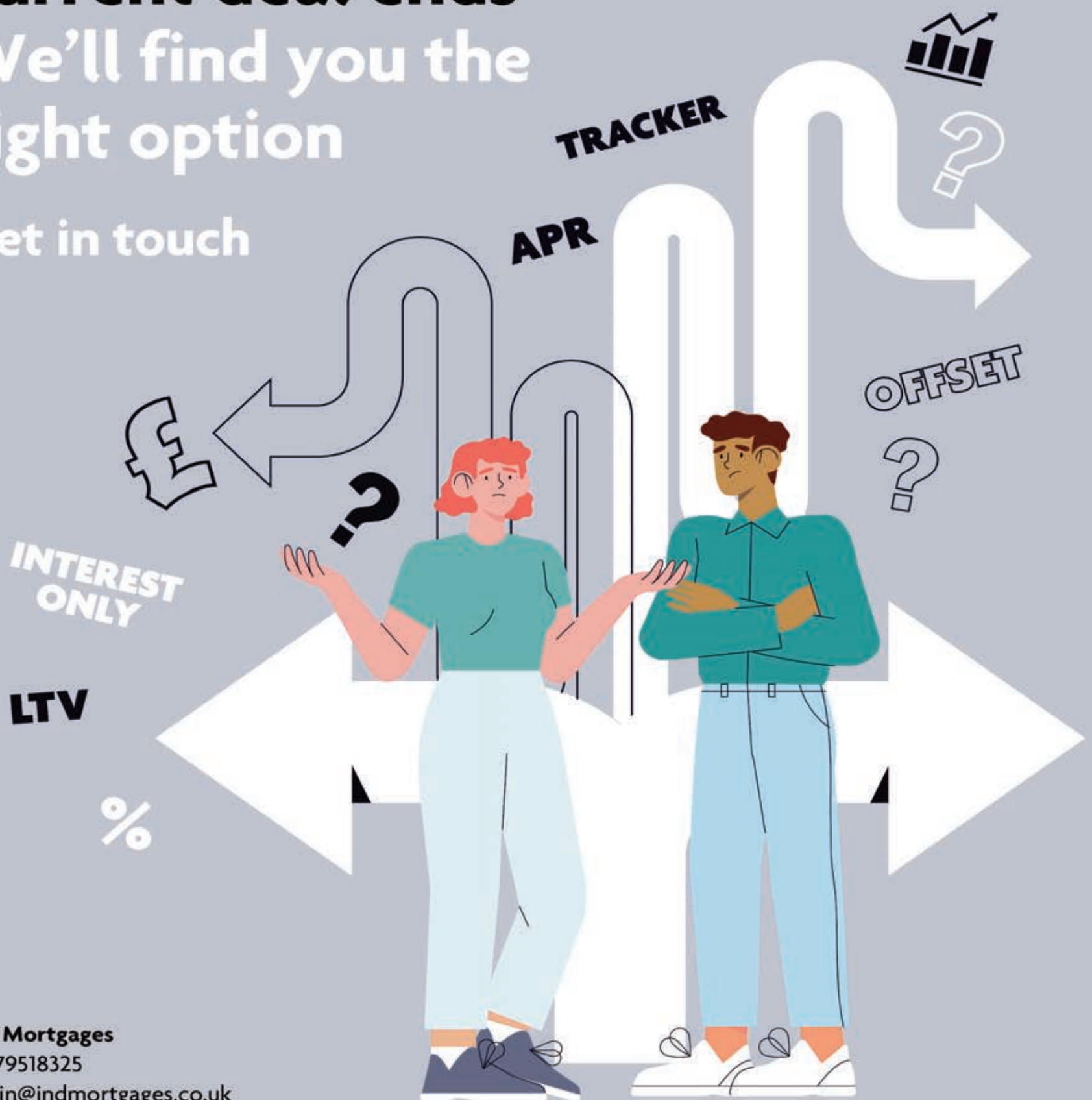
● Disbanded with the retirement of the Jaguar in 2007, the squadron was reformed at RAF Leuchars in 2010 to fly the Typhoon and has been resident at Lossiemouth since 2014.



HANGAR HERO: Distinctive Jaguar XX119, complete with Can Opener artwork, inset

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Medics help veterans have trip of a lifetime

All equal in warm waters of Maldives

Tracey Allen

A GROUP of RAF healthcare personnel have been to the Maldives with the charity Diving With the Injured (DWI) that organises trips around the world for wounded and injured veterans as part of their rehabilitation.

Earlier this winter seven staff from Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service, whose involvement with DWI came about through the Defence Medical Services Diving Club, joined the latest, week-long expedition.

The group made daily dives into the crystal-clear waters of the Indian Ocean from the boat Emperor Explorer.

"For many this was their first open ocean experience as well as their first experience of the Maldives," explained RAF nurse and the trip's spokesman Cpl Joseph Cannizzaro.

"Some were even lucky enough to spot a black-tipped shark and an octopus on the first day.

"Local dive guides had us using reef hooks to secure ourselves in the current to enjoy the wildlife. At this site there was a manta ray cleaning station where mantas rely on wrasse fish to clean their teeth and wounds and rid them of any parasites.

"For the last dive of the day we waited for the sun to set and got torches out to attract plankton – the favourite food of the manta ray. The rays came instantly, with several sightings before we were in the water.

"Divers descended to the illuminated sea bed and watched in awe as manta rays fed on the plankton centimetres from their heads. Many of the experienced divers said this was one of the greatest dives they had ever



HIDDEN WORLD: The group explore the delights of the Indian Ocean

completed – a one in a million occurrence to witness so many manta rays in one place, constantly feeding over us."

During the next four days, the group were able to 'get up close and personal' to a stunning variety of inquisitive fish including grey reef sharks, barracudas, bat fish, trigger fish and tuna fish.

They also encountered eagle rays, turtles, huge swarms of glass fish, lobster and puffer fish and, after dinner, a pod of dolphins hunting for food at the back of the boat.

The divers also saw blue line snappers, black tip reef sharks and nurse sharks on the sea bed. Another night dive site was crowded with lionfish and giant trevallies coming out to hunt.

Cpl Cannizzaro said: "On our final early morning dive before

breakfast some team members perfected their videography skills by filming a veteran deploying his specially-made delayed surface marker buoy – allowing easy use and minimising the limitations of his injury.

"On a great final dive for the trip amazing sea life was seen by all, including a family of spotted eagle rays, a group of baby reef sharks and even an octopus. After the last dive on our last day we had the opportunity to venture out onto land – the first time we had worn shoes in over a week."

He added: "This all may just sound like a great holiday, but throughout the week we had the chance to share our stories – and the value of experiences offered by DWI is second to none. Our healthcare professionals were able to hear about how the veterans got their injuries, their experience of military healthcare and their rehabilitation journey.

"By sharing these stories, the veterans enable our



healthcare professionals to develop an understanding and have an open discussion about complex subjects such as PTSD, depression, stump care, prosthetic limbs, phantom pains, skin grafts and what happens after you have left the Armed Forces.

"Every one of our group, although we have physical and mental differences, became equals in the water. This is DWI's sole ethos – it is a safe space to be frank about your past experiences, to ask questions, to

learn how to dive and share in the enjoyment of this wonderful sport."

Cpl Cannizzaro explained: "The cost to send one injured veteran is £3,000, of which they pay a 10 per cent contribution. We fund raise approximately £2,700 for each veteran, the healthcare professionals attending the trip self-fund. Last year we took 15 veterans and 15 healthcare professionals diving with DWI."

● Go to: hospitalcharity.org.divingwiththeinjured for more information about DWI.





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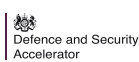
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Tim Morris

Mazda MX5 RF (from £27,725 otr)

Motoring



THERE ARE those, in great numbers, who will tell you that we need to accept the inevitable. Modern technology means that buyers who want old-school sports cars are becoming extinct. That may eventually be true... But not today.

As long as cars like the Mazda MX5 are on the market, there will be fun to be had behind the wheel and this model's last stand is important.

The original MX5 was designed back in 1989 to emulate the handling characteristics of the wonderful Lotus Elan. It had pop-up headlamps, a simple pull-up rag-top and a staggeringly well-balanced chassis. It was brilliant fun and, more importantly, affordable. I was a massive Lotus fan and the MX5 was one of the only cars that came close to capturing the Elan's feel on the road.

Now in its fourth generation, it's become an icon in its own right. More than a million MX5s had been sold back in 2016 and it remains the top selling sports car in the UK. As times have changed, rival companies have dumped performance in lieu of green models and this has left the MX5 almost unrivalled in its class. It's a renegade that refuses to conform to modern norms, a maverick.

Exterior

These days, you can order the MX5 with a traditional, easy to throw off, manual soft-top or a clever, electrically operated, fold-away hard top. This is called the RF, or 'retracting fastback'.

The RF does add a chunk of extra weight to the MX5 but it looks like a cool 'Targa' top and is a lot more sturdy.

Overall, it still looks like a lightweight sports car but with



There's always vroom for fun-packed MX5

more muscular arches and a beefier nose than previous versions. The BBS alloy wheels, with those fiery red Brembo brake callipers peeking through, add to the effect. I think Mazda's hit the sweet-spot here.

Interior

The interior of the MX5 looks sharp. Soft, textured surfaces and

metal-effect trim cover the most obvious parts of the cabin and the seats look suitable sporty. If you look lower down, you'll spot a fair amount of hard-touch plastic but it's fairly well disguised. For the money, the interior feels surprisingly expensive.

You sit behind the wheel, with your legs straight out in front of you. This feels like a real sports car should, with your legs fitting snugly into what is basically a tunnel, with your backside close to the road. It feels like you're driving a precise go-kart.

This flat position is how sports cars should be set up, but it's not perfect. The driving seat is actually mounted fairly high for a small sports car, which will leave anyone who's over six-foot almost peering over the windscreen. You can tilt the base of the driver's seat, but you can't adjust the height. The seat in the RF doesn't go as far back, or recline as much, as the seat in the Roadster either, so tall buyers beware.

Front visibility is brilliant and you could practically thread the MX5 through the eye of a needle. Rear visibility, rubbish. It's a sports car with cool lines though, live with it. That's what mirrors and sensors are for.

Every MX-5 gets a smart 7.0in touchscreen with Android Auto (wired) and wireless Apple CarPlay smartphone mirroring, sat-nav, DAB radio and Bluetooth connectivity. The system is easy to control, using a rotary dial and shortcut buttons that are located behind the gear lever.

You also get a punchy nine-speaker Bose sound system that's a doddle to use and super-loud.

On The Road

Delivering power to its rear wheels through a beautifully precise manual gearbox, it is a perfect example of analogue transmission. The 'SkyActiv' engines are naturally aspirated petrol units, honed by nuanced technology. Performance is

Mazda MX5 RF

Pros

- Massive fun
- Excellent handling
- Affordable to buy and run

Cons

- Needs more adjustment on the driving position... that's it

Verdict

The Mazda MX-5 RF isn't as fast as more expensive sports cars, but it is epic fun. There's nothing left in this class that gives you so much fun for so little outlay.

enhanced and yet there are no sudden electronic power bands. The whole experience feels natural.

You can instantly feel the advantage that the light weight brings. It responds instantly to inputs and steers with immense agility, capturing an almost lost art of engineering.

You can turn on/off stability control and lane keep assist with a simple button press but that's the extent of electronic intervention you'll find here.

Our test car was the RF2.0 184ps Homura and it felt particularly lively. On paper 0-60mph is achieved in 6.5 seconds and it will hit a top end of 137mph. In reality, it feels a lot more exciting than that.

If economy worries you, Mazda claims 40.9mpg for the 2.0-litre car. There's also a 1.5-litre version that returns 44.8mpg if that's your priority. Either way, the 45-litre fuel tank makes it a practical touring car.





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BOBSLEIGH

Top-10 finishes keeping Games dream alive

Daniel Abrahams

TWO TOP-10 St Moritz finishes in the recent rounds of European bobsleigh has brought the winter Olympic dream of Cpl John Stanbridge one step closer.

Team Stanbridge finished eighth in their seventh two-man World Cup race, and ninth in the four-man, at the famous Swiss course.

Speaking as he prepared to board a ferry for Lillehammer and round six of the race season, Stanbridge told *RAF News*: "This was our best result in four-man so far. We haven't finished outside the top 10 all season, Altenburg aside where I crashed.

"Nobody expected anything from us this season, but to be here, having returned from injury, is great [Stanbridge broke his neck during a crash last season]. To see the team take that next step is amazing."

Having started his season with a top-six finish, Stanbridge began to notch up the top-10 finishes. He added: "We have

been consistent. We are now at a level where we are competing with the guys at the top. We had our first World Cup race and to get a second run was fantastic [when a team finishes in the top 20 during the first lauf/run they qualify for a second run].

"To have that consistency is special."

The team have top-six finishes in the two-man in Sigulda, Latvia



TEAM LEADER: Corporal John Stanbridge (above left) is enjoying Euro and World success with his four-man crew as well as the two-man, below



AIR POWER: Stanbridge (right) with teammate and fellow aviator Cpl Alex Cartegena



FLYING THE FLAG: John, below left, celebrates two-man sixth place at Lillehammer, Norway



along with top-10 finishes in Lillehammer, Norway in the four-man, ending just two hundredths of a second off fifth place in the 2-man.

The team's World Cup race in St Moritz was screened live on the IBSF Sliding YouTube channel with an audience of thousands watching on, and all this one year after suffering a serious, career and life-threatening neck injury.

Stanbridge said: "I am more relaxed now and our new coach, two-time Belgium Olympic sledder, Ann Vannieuwenhuyse – has been brilliant.

"We have made a big GB

statement. We are pushing to be GB number 2.

"I have more than 100 runs at Lillehammer, I had just four at St Moritz and we still managed to produce what we produced.

"I'm excited to take that next step. Sport has been a massive part of my RAF career, developing through the RAF bobsleigh sport pathway as a novice back in 2013 to now racing at International level for GB has been amazing.

"We are setting our sights firmly on qualifying for the 2024 World Championship in Winterberg, Germany."

● Follow team Stanbridge on Instagram: [bobteamstanbridge](https://www.instagram.com/bobteamstanbridge).

Would you like to see your sport featured in RAF News? Send a short report (max 300 words) and a couple of photographs (attached jpegs) to: Sports@rafnews.co.uk



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HOOKED:
Service
angler with
his catch

SEA ANGLING

All for one

Daniel Abrahams

A NEW AGE of Inter-Service cooperation has been adopted at UKAF Sea Angling.

And it's left RAF team captain Sgt Steve Rathbone confident of success at the upcoming Service Angling Match Federation Challenge next weekend.

The tri-Service event will see the teams break down old rivalries and build closer working relationships at the competition in Cresswell Bay, Northumberland on February 16-17.

The River Tyne will act as bad weather replacement venue for the challenge.

Rathbone said: "We have changed the way we do business. We are confident we can really take the match to the SAME.

"The competition and opponent is highly regarded, so in respect to that and to give

Service anglers put rivalries aside for the good of UKAF team

ourselves the best chance we are all working together, it's a line in the sand or a new dawn.

"All three Services will be fighting as one.

"We have a good relationship between us all, which has been growing, so we can sit down and chat, and I can only see this growing. We are in a far better place together, there will be no information withheld from nay service, so we can all take it to our opponents."

Rathbone added: "This new

approach has proven to be ground-breaking.

"The Army had a competition at the Bay a few days ago, so any information they found useful has been fed back for the UKAF team and we have all looked at it."

The UKAF team, led by Major Scott Booty, will arrive in Sunderland a few days prior to the 16th for two days practice at the host venue.

Rathbone will be in attendance along with the RAF contingent for the tri-Service team; including Chf Tech Malcolm Hore, Chf Tech Mike Treharne, Sgt Lee Brackenbury, AS1 (T) Colin Appleton, Sgt Joe Roberts and WO Darren Rose.



RUGBY UNION

Police lay down the law

British Police	81
RAF Women	10

"A TOUGH day at the office," said RAF women's rugby assistant coach Sqn Ldr Ian Cokayne after a heavy 81-10 defeat to the British Police.

He added: "There were positives, which we take heart from, and nobody left the pitch with their head down. We had a good development season and have found some new blood, plus we had a really excellent camp at Henlow, so it's good across the board – just maybe the score. But it was the season opener and we move on to our next camp and game."

While an experienced forward pack, led by Cpl Annie Forbes, was reinforced with some promising new players as Cpl Tyler Lewis, AS1 Mollie Knapman and AS1 Hope Bannatyne, took to the Bedford Park field, the backs were less experienced due to unavailability of senior players through operational commitments and injuries.

As the first game in the IS campaign, the Police were a big test and an early injury to Cpl Leonie Mahon on the wing made the task much harder.

While the RAF were competitive at set pieces, they struggled throughout the first half to deal with the pace of the opposition backs and pinpoint kicks on the 4G pitch, going in 48-5 down at the break – the score for the RAF coming from Cpl Daniker Wilmore.



OPENER: Tough game for the RAF Women

PHOTO: SBS

In the second half the RAF were again asked to defend for long periods and more forced changes saw several forwards deployed into the back line.

The RAF defended admirably with increased line speed and competitive

tackling. Unfortunately, the continued speed of the Police wings was too much for the makeshift backline to contain, and the score finished 81-10 to the police with a well-deserved score by Cpl Kat Robinson.

ATHLETICS

African adventure

THERE WAS further success for veteran RAF runner Sgt David Adam in Africa.

Adam, who became Tunisian Cross Country and Track National Masters Champion last year, stormed to third in his opening race of the year, the Tunisian Federation Masters Race.

The RAF man was facing a tough field in the over-55 category, with the former World Indoor champion and the runner-up in last year's Masters over-40s 10km road race in the mix.

The 6km cross country race was held in 24°C heat, which Adam classed as 'pleasant with a nice breeze'. He added: "I have some big races coming up, including the Tunisian National Cross-Country Championships for Master athletes, so this was a good test."

Adam had closed out the year with a ninth overall, but got a first in class in the over-50s category in the Nabeul 6km road race – in a field of more than 1,000 athletes.

FOOTBALL

Astra League

AIR & SPACE Ops lead the Churchill division of the Astra League going into the penultimate round of fixtures later this month.

Air & Space Ops, who have led the league all season, winning three and drawing one of their matches, have already qualified for the tournament's semi-finals, with their opponent and fixture date to be confirmed.

Currently sitting on 10 points after four matches, they lead RAF TG5 FC First by one point. The leaders will play bottom-placed Scribes (TG17) First away at Cosford on February 15, while TG5 FC First play third-placed RAF Police Men's at Halton on the same day in the final round of matches, with all fixtures kicking off at 13.30.

Sport

FOOTBALL

Chelsea date for Kentish Cup men



CUP HOLDERS:
Chelsea Pensioners

UKAF's football stars were given a capital reward after visits to the Ministry of Defence and Royal Chelsea Hospital to honour their latest Kentish Cup triumph.

Having reclaimed the oldest European cup trophy at the turn of the year in France, the team, led by head coach Cpl Darryl White, were invited to the MOD's Main Building by the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, to mark the success.

The team's day, which featured a photo opportunity

outside Number 10 Downing Street, started with a tour around the Royal Chelsea Hospital.

"He's very high up, isn't he?," said RAF UKAF star Cpl Jake Gosling of the CDS. "It's nice to have that back-and-forth banter."

"He, unfortunately, supports Bristol City though and I played for Bristol Rovers."

"He seemed really nice nevertheless and we're very proud to be here."

● Follow UKAFFC on Instagram @ukafffootball.



STREETS AHEAD: Squad at No 10

EQUITATION

Invitation to saddle up

THE RAF Equitation Grassroots scheme has confirmed two further training camp dates.

An Equitation Clinic will be hosted at RAF Cranwell from May 27-29, with a second at Riseholme Equitation Centre, Lincoln, October 21-23 (half term).

Camp OIC Cpl Jim Haughton said: "The Cranwell camp is designed to cater for people with their own horses, while the Lincoln one will be for advanced riders who do not and for those competing in the Inter Station League, or who would like to."

For further information or to apply for places email: WYT-RAFEA-Grassroots@modgovuk.onmicrosoft.com.



HOCKEY

Game on for the Olympics

NETHERLANDS, GERMANY, Spain, France, and South Africa await ASI Liam Sanford's GB team after he helped his country secure a place at the Paris Olympics later this year.

Sanford, pictured, was an integral part of the team's qualification run in Ranchi, Oman, which saw them finish second behind Germany, after a 1-0 defeat.

The RAF man also reached his 100-cap milestone for GB in the final game and led the team out.

England won all of their Pool Three games with a 6-1 victory over Pakistan, a 4-1 victory against Malaysia and a 6-0 shut-out against People's Republic of China.

He said: "It was an incredibly proud moment for me to be able to lead out the team on my 100th combined cap, especially as we were safe in the knowledge that we had already qualified for Paris.

"As always, I am incredibly grateful for the support I have received from the RAF Sports Board Elite Athlete scheme, RAF Hockey and the RAF as a whole, which has enabled me to pursue my Olympic dreams."

The 3-1 semi-final victory over New Zealand meant the free-scoring Brits ended the tournament with 19 goals for and only four against.

Posting about the 100-match milestone on the team's Twitter

page @GBHockey, it called Sanford: 'An absolute legend for GB and England'.

With the top three teams qualifying, GB already knew they had secured their Paris spot before the final game.

RAF Hockey vice-chairman Wg Cdr Dave 'Rosie' Oatley said: "I am delighted to see Liam contribute to GB Men's Hockey Team's success in qualifying for this year's Olympics in Paris.

"This is exactly what the RAF Elite Athlete scheme (EAP) is about, providing the wraparound support to our aviators to enable those with the talent to achieve outstanding success at the very highest level.

"Seeing Liam lead out the GB Men on his combined 100th cap in the play-off final was an immensely proud day for Liam, his family, friends and, of course, RAF Hockey. We look forward to following and supporting him this summer in the team's quest for Olympic Gold."

GB will be looking to end their long wait for another Olympic Games medal, the last time they took one was gold in Seoul in 1988, some 36 years ago, but having taken silver in the EuroHockey Championships and the 2022-23 season of FIH Hockey Pro League, followed by this second place in the Olympic Qualification tournament, hopes will be high this summer.



LIAM SANFORD: The RAF man is an integral part of the GB set-up

Up for the Challenge in Austria

IT WAS the halfway mark at the RAF Alpine championships in Austria with personnel of all levels finding their feet in preparation for the final week of competition.

The opening seven days of the two-week Alpine Challenge 24 acts as an introduction to all three disciplines - skiing, snowboarding and Telemark - with coaching and time on the slopes.



The final week's competition decides the Inter-Service teams to be taken forward to the French Alps.

RAFWSA chairman Gp Capt Martin Cunningham said: "The halfway point of Alpine Challenge 24 has so far been a fantastic event which has seen everyone involved thrive and grow, be it within the sporting arena or just personally.

"It has been a pleasure to see this in action across the board. The conditions have been excellent, and it has made the 50 weeks of planning by the committee that went into holding the challenge worth it all.

"We will be sitting down in the next few weeks to begin it all again with renewed enthusiasm."

Further details are available via station Winter Sports OICs and on the association's RAFWSAA Facebook group.

pages of the best of **RAF Sports** action

CYCLING

RAF clean up in mud

Victory in UKAF Champs

Daniel Abrahams

A NEAR cleansweep saw the RAF dominate the muddy Army-hosted UKAF Inter-Services Cyclocross Championships at Mallory Park for the second year running.

The Airforce team won the overall tournament by 12 points on the 1.5-mile long track, which the women's team completed four laps of and the men five at around 40 minutes per lap for the men and one hour for the female riders.

Cpl Ian Lee took the men's race following a sprint to the line, with AS1 Tom Whitworth second, while Cpl Sarah Toms took the runner-up spot in the women's event against a dominant Army team.

Toms said: "The course was varied: long, sticky, muddy straights, gravel, forest tracks, multiple short, sharp hills, slippery off camber, a set of hurdles and a steep muddy bank that needed a dismount off the bike and run. It had it all, with the added element of Storm Isha rolling in."

"The advantage of such a varied circuit was that at some point it would play to a rider's strength, making for a great race with back and forth of positions."

"The pit stops were also a challenge, with the conditions clogging up the bikes. With half lap changes needed, it kept everyone on their toes."

"A second-year win for the RAF was a brilliant achievement. We have strength in depth and our morale was boosted by the



MUDDY HEROES:
Cpl Sarah Toms and, inset, Cpl Ian Lee

constant support of WO Adey Hoyle."

The Service's championship race was held at the same time, with Lee taking first place,

Whitworth second and AS1 Tom Stegemen third.

In the women's event Cpl Toms took first followed by Sgt Lucy Kershaw and Cpl Kat Robinson.

The male veteran crown went to Hoyle, while Kershaw took the female veteran title.

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RUGBY UNION

Uni boffins make the grade with late penalty



SO CLOSE: Just one point separated the sides at the final whistle

Oxford University	22
RAF	21

THE RAF took an early lead but suffered a last-minute loss as they were pipped to a game they should have won against Oxford University, going down 22-21.

Speaking after the game at Iffley Road, Oxford, head coach Sgt Justin Coleman said: "We started with a lot of youngsters and after a solid half we were still in contention at the break. We made our changes at half-time and took charge, but just could not make it over the line."

"We left four tries out there and then switched off in the last minute to lose it. The lessons we learned tonight cannot be replicated on the training field, so it's important that we had the problems now, rather than in the Inter-Services."

"We have games and camps to come, so there's plenty of time to work on things. It's all moving forward well and tonight's game has been a great opportunity."

Coleman's men took the lead inside the first five minutes as they faced the students for the

first time since 2015. Cpl Ryan Pugh put them ahead after good build-up work. This sparked the students into life and they took the lead with a converted try.

The RAF then produced a great move to see Flt Lt Karl Bowling over the line for 10-7. The try started in the middle, before a series of clever passes spread the play out to the Oxford right, where the aviators touched down.



It was nothing more than the RAF deserved, but it led to a period of student dominance which ended in two tries, before the military men hauled the scores with two penalties to go in 19-13 down at the break.

A Cpl Jorden Oatley penalty cut the deficit further, with

the RAF camped in the Oxford half – without finding a way through.

It took Coleman's men until the 70th minute to be rewarded for their superiority as a series of quick passes out to the Oxford left returned inside cleverly by team captain Cpl Alex Hayton allowed Cpl Mark Williams to touch down from close range.

Having dug deep through the second half, a frustrating last-minute penalty saw the hosts home by a single point.

Recent RAF training camps have included input from international players including former Wales star Jonathan Thomas and ex-England man Shaun Perry.

Welsh fullback Leigh Halfpenny also gave a virtual coaching session before the Oxford game.

Coleman added: "To increase external input during our camps with international players coming in and speaking virtually to the players has been great."