

# CUTTING IT...

**T**ake a man who has been both the Jet Provost and Harrier display pilot, spent three years as a member of the Red Arrows before becoming their leader and then going on to lead a front-line Harrier squadron to war in Afghanistan.

Add to that two further ex-Red Arrows' pilots, who have both seen active service, along with a civilian pilot who has logged more than 3,500 hours in over 60 types. Have four Extra 300LP aircraft - capable of plus and minus 10G - built to your specification and you have the UK's newest full-time display team, The Blades.

The pilots - Andy Offer, Andy Evans, Myles Garland, all of whom are ex-cadets, and Bruno van Waeyenberghe - have already cut a dash with an invitation to the Beckhams' World Cup party.

The four-ship, with the St George's Cross on the underside of the right wing for the occasion, opened the celebrity bash, wowing the A-list audience with a series of formation fly-pasts, rolls and opposition breaks.

Chris Norton, co-founder and Director of 2Excel Aviation, the company behind The Blades, said: "Putting on the display at this site was tricky due to the surrounding villages and the complexity of the airspace which we had to work with.

"However, the pilots are exceptional and their skills really shone through. We are delighted to have been part of the England Team's send-off and we hope England excels in the World Cup."

Air Cadet sent Cdt Flt Sgt Antoni Otulakowski from 134 (Bedford) Sqn to Sywell in Northampton to find out what gives the Blades' their edge...

I spoke to Myles Garland, whose last posting in the RAF was as Executive Officer of No 3 (Fighter) Sqn. He flies as Blade 3.

A former front-line Jaguar pilot, Myles (33) spent 16 years in the RAF and still fondly recalls his original inspiration to fly with the 'Reds'.

"I was six years old when I watched the Reds do a display in Devon, I know it sounds cliché, but it's true". From there he set about working to achieve his aim of becoming a pilot in the 'Reds', after gaining a Sixth-Form Scholarship, Myles joined the RAF and lived out his dream.

The image of 2Excel is professional from the outset, no cost is spared in their new headquarters in Sywell, Northamptonshire,

nor are there any corners cut elsewhere; from their personalised flying suits to their precision flying, 2Excel look the part.

As Myles explains, this is essential. "It's what we're all about, in everything we do, we try to excel, it's the epitome of what we are". Even their aircraft's registrations have been written specifically so that they all spell out "Excel" (except for Blade 1, Andy Offer's, which carries the personalised registration of G-OFFO).

At the moment, the Blades have only flown events in Great Britain, but judging from what I'd seen so far, I guessed that the team had greater ambitions; and they did. I asked about where they were intending to do displays. "We have some events coming up this summer in Germany, France, Holland..."

The aircraft that the team use, the Extra 300LP, is quite small, and the navigation equipment isn't as advanced as in many aeroplanes, however, the pilots maintain that the logistics are no problem. Although the Extra 300 is designed for competition aerobatics, it is not difficult to fly straight and level, though I'm sure that that is easier said than done.

The aircraft is very manoeuvrable with roll rates approaching 720 degrees a second. Mainland Europe, is within the aircraft's range, that being about three to four hours.

Predictably, however, the team have their sights set even higher than mainland Europe, "of course we'd like to do displays further away than that", Myles speaks of displaying the aircraft worldwide. The logistics for this are a bit more technical, the aircraft would have to be disassembled partially, put on a larger plane and reconstructed at the destination.

The aircraft themselves are a source of interest, "a lot of research went into selecting the plane, it's reliable, and used in world-class competitions," Myles explains.

The pilots are clearly fans, and the engineers are keen on the aircraft too. Again ex-RAF, the chief engineer showed me how the whole fuselage from the fire wall to the fin comes away as one piece giving incredible access to the underlying







Jamiroq's front man, Jay Kay, at the launch of the UK's newest display team - The Blades. 2 Excel Aviation Ltd was formed by Chris Norton OBE, DFC and Andy Offer OBE. The company focuses on specialist Corporate Entertainment experiences, Leadership Management and Team Building. The Blades will also be appearing at over 40 air shows this season across Europe and beyond.

(Pictures from 2 Excel Aviation Ltd & Phillip Jones)



shocked to hear that it isn't all too dissimilar from the Hawk, with the exception of less power - the plane works like any other. "The inputs are the same, and you get the same outputs, it's all relative, you only have to make slight adjustments."

On the subject of comparing aeroplanes, what would Myles' dream aircraft be? "Well, that depends, for going to war, or for flying? The Harrier, no, the F-15...it's the mother."

I asked Myles whether he regretted leaving the military. "There are, of course, some things that I miss, but my last day, 31 March 2006 was excellent, so I don't miss it yet."

That day marked the final day of No 3 (Fighter) Squadron flying the Harrier, and their formation at RAF Cottesmore as the first operational Typhoon squadron. As Executive Officer, Myles partook in the celebrations and took the bow in the Harrier flypast and hover.

No doubt we shall see more of the Blades throughout the summer, and in the future, and I believe that they will become the household name that they want to be, after all, they seem set to excel.

structure.

The Extra 300's structure contains a mix of technologies ranging from wood and fabric through to carbon fibre. Of course, after working on Tornados and Nimrods, I suppose that these little orange planes are relatively simple, yet they are still

audience will, for the first time, be able to see live footage from the planes above them. 2Excel developed the technology alongside the BBC and will develop the system this season whilst seeking sponsorship.

I wondered how, after working in the military for so long, Myles found working in the commercial sector. Financially, it is obvious that the game is different - "We don't have a budget that can be topped up by the Treasury, if it gets low, we are accountable for everything we spend."

"But I'm working with the same people that I was working with in the RAF, and doing the same flying, to be honest, not too much has changed."

But what about the aircraft?  
I was

demanding from a work perspective.

The Extras require a 25 hour service, which only takes a few weeks to clock up, as well as a 50 hour, and a 100 hour service.

Despite the simplicity of the airframe, there is some cutting-edge technology on-board. Currently on one of the orange planes (plans are in place to extend the system across the fleet) are three cameras (the system can use a maximum of four cameras at a time at any of six positions). "We believe this to be the first time that such a system has been used on any aircraft, worldwide."

The cameras are operated via switches on the control column allowing for a variation on the "HOTAS", Hands On Throttle And Stick, system found in fast-jets).

The cameras feed broadcast quality images in real time to a screen, from where it can be recorded, or shown to an audience. The images can also be recorded on-board the aircraft.

The proposal is that at air shows the