

Jetting in for air and motors show

by Alan Golden

WINGS & Wheels, the annual celebration of the best of British aviation and motoring, boasts another spectacular line-up of attractions this year.

For the first time the event at Dunsfold Park, which last year attracted a crowd of more than 25,000 people and raised £80,000 for charity, is being spread over two days of the Bank Holiday weekend.

The airfield, built by the Canadians in the Second World War, has seen more than its fair share of history and it reaches another milestone this year with the 50th anniversary of the world's first vertical take-off.

The prototype of the Harrier 'jump jet' made its first tethered take-off at the aerodrome on October 21 1960, and to mark the occasion the Harrier will be returning to Wings & Wheels after a break of four years.

At the launch of this year's event on Tuesday (Aug 17) there was yet another historic moment as a Harrier flew in to the airfield to be greeted by 82-year-old Duncan Simpson, one of the test pilots who helped develop the aircraft.

Dunsfold Park chief executive, Jim McAllister, described the meeting between Mr Simpson, who lives in Guildford, and Harrier pilot, Steve Kenworthy, as "amazing historic".

Mr Simpson was the third Hawker pilot to fly the plane, originally known in prototype form as the P1127, as he explained: "The first planes were flown by Bill Bedford and Hugh Merewether in 1960. I flew it first in 1962."

He has fond memories of Dunsfold, having arrived there in 1954 to join chief test pilot Neville Duke to work on the Hawker Hunter. He stayed until 1978.

Mr Simpson admitted working on the prototype Harrier was a challenge, given that it was the world's first – and only successful – vertical take-off jet, but he said: "It was all very carefully worked out and we were carefully briefed."

"The P1127 was a challenge – it had never been done before. It was pioneering – it was a very brave decision to go ahead with it."

"The first time I flew it I began to wonder whether we

Reporters Alan Golden and Beatrice Phillpotts get a sneak preview of this year's Wings & Wheels spectacular

would ever get it into successful service, but you have to have faith in these projects," he said, acknowledging that "top level engineers" had been involved in its development at Kingston, Dunsfold and Bristol.

The first pre-production Harriers were flying in 1967, with the first aircraft delivered to RAF Wittering in 1969.

Mr Simpson also played a major role in the development of another successful plane at Dunsfold, the Hawk.

"I made the first flight on the Hawk in 1974. We delivered the first one to the RAF in 1976 and of course they are still flying in large numbers."

He would like to see Dunsfold retain its aviation connections.

"This airfield has a very large capability – the runway is a national asset and I would like to see it being used sensibly as a national asset," added Mr Simpson.

Another test pilot present for Tuesday's launch was David Lockspeiser, who arrived in 1956 after leaving the RAF to

work on the Hunter.

"I have very happy memories of Dunsfold."

"When I was here I had a Jaguar XK140 and used to have fun belting around the perimeter track," he said.

The Red Arrows will be headlining on both days of Wings & Wheels, while other flying highlights alongside the Harrier will include the RAF Typhoon, Vulcan bomber, Blades aerobatic team, Breitling wing walkers and Tigers parachute team.

The 'Wheels' of the show is masterminded by Brooklands Museum, which has lined up a tantalising assortment of motoring icons, including Aston Martins, Ferraris, Jaguars, AC Cobras and many more, including the McLaren Mercedes SLR.

A retail village will spring up on the airfield and there will be plenty of other attractions for all the family, including a fair-ground, aviation and motoring simulators, motorbike demonstrations and trials and driving opportunities with Mercedes-Benz World.



Pilot Brendan O'Brien takes to the skies to demonstrate his skills. Pictures: Darren Pepe.



Harrier test pilot Duncan Simpson with pilot Steve Kenworthy.



Wings and Wheels is running over the bank holiday weekend this year.