

From Kevin Farnworth

After working on Lightnings at Warton I was transferred to Boscombe Down in early 1964 and my first reaction on seeing XR219 was its beauty. As part of the ground crew I was regularly given the job (pleasure) of sitting in the pilot's seat in control of the brakes as a safety measure, as the aircraft was towed round the airfield.

We spent a large part of the summer working on XR219 on the airfield. Half of the staff was getting the aircraft ready for trials, whilst the rest of the crew waited part way down the runway to cool the brakes with large compressed air pipes from a specially adapted truck.

Roland Beamont had been building up the taxi-ing speeds at the same time as testing the troublesome parachute. One day I will never forget was when, at considerable speed, the parachute failed and I and other colleagues went to apply cold air to the wheels. The brakes had been applied very hard, resulting in the Maxeret units being white hot causing the tyres to explode. To this day I do not know who pulled me away from the tyre which could have resulted in a very serious situation.

We spent the rest of the day on the runway trying to free the brakes and arrived back at the hangar in the early evening. To make a bad day worse, the fuselage of XR220 was being transported into the hangar when a spring on the articulated lorry failed, causing XR220 to fall off the back. Finally, we heard that an Avro Vulcan wanted to land on the runway where we were working on XR219 but had to use a cross runway and came off the end and crashed.

It was a pleasure and something I will never forget being involved in the first flight of XR219 and seeing it return to Warton. On its cancellation I felt very disillusioned and went to work in Germany.

On a lighter note, I made several trips back to Preston on the company aircraft. One Saturday afternoon I flew back to Warton, caught a bus to Preston to watch the second half of the football match with North End at Deepdale, went home for tea, then returned to Boscombe Down on the BAe van which ran every evening.

A couple of years ago I had the privilege of being invited by BAe to the anniversary of the Lightning's first flight. I flew from Warton to Cambridge on the company aircraft and then went by bus to Duxford Air Museum to view XR220. What memories that brought back!