



Hawker Hurricane

The Hawker Hurricane was developed by Sidney Camm. As a fighter plane, the Hawker Hurricane was to revolutionise all future fighter plane design. It was to play a vital role in the Battle of Britain and eventually in many other theatres of World War Two.

The Hurricane first made its mark in February 1938. In this month, a Hurricane piloted by Squadron Leader J W Gillan, commanding officer of 111 Squadron, had flown from Scotland to Northolt, a distance of 327 miles, in 48 minutes at an average speed of 409 mph (admittedly with a tail wind).

The history of the Hurricane went back to 1933 when Sidney Camm discussed with the Air Ministry the possibilities of producing a monoplane fighter. At this time, the Air Ministry was not keen on a monoplane despite the fact that a monoplane had established a world speed record of 423 mph (an Italian Macchi MC.72) in April 1933.

The first prototype Hurricane flew on November 6th 1935. It had been based on the design of the Fury plane built by Hawker and was powered by a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. In February 1936, the Hurricane exceeded all of the demands placed on it and on June 3rd 1936, the Air Ministry placed an order for 600 Hurricane fighter planes. On October 12th, 1937, the first flight of a production Hurricane took place. By the end of 1938, 200 Hurricanes had been delivered to the RAF's Fighter Command.

In September 1939, 19 RAF squadrons had been equipped with Hurricanes. A Hurricane was the first RAF plane to destroy a Luftwaffe plane in October 1939 when Pilot Officer Mould shot down a Dornier Do-17 over France. It was to prove a short-term success. In the German attack on France in the Spring of 1940, 25% of all Hurricanes were destroyed by the Luftwaffe (some 200 planes).

It was in the Battle of Britain that the Hurricane made its mark. The battle is frequently associated with the Spitfire, but the Hurricane played a major role in this battle. On August 8th, 1940, the RAF could call on 32 squadrons of Hurricanes and 19 of Spitfires. Therefore, the Hurricane was the dominant British plane in this battle.

Though slower than the Spitfire, the Hurricane developed a reputation as a plane that could take more than a few hits from the Germans and continue to fly. To some the Spitfire was a thoroughbred horse; superb until it was damaged. The Hurricane, though less graceful and slower than the Spitfire, was more a shire horse; incredibly strong and capable of taking many hits before it was taken out.

"It was a delightful aeroplane - not as agile as a Spitfire, but it had a very good gun platform. It was very steady and took a tremendous amount of battle damage without appearing to worry too much."

Pilot officer R G A Barclay

The Hurricane, in various guises, saw combat in most areas of World War Two – the jungles of the Far East, the deserts of North Africa etc. Almost 3000 Hurricanes were delivered to Russia during the war. In total, more than 14,000 Hurricanes fought in World War Two in all theatres of war – a remarkable achievement for a remarkable plane.

Facts:

- Crew: 1
- Maximum speed: 328 mph (550 km/h) at 22,000 feet (6705 meters)
- Ceiling: 36,500 feet (11,125 metres)
- Range: 480 miles (772 km)
- Armaments: 8 x 0.303 machine guns.

