

First nine-ship for 2017 Red Arrows team

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THE 2017 Red Arrows team have flown their first “nine-ship” ahead of this year’s display season.

Carrying out their winter training at RAF Scampton, the Lincolnshire home of the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, the Squadron is renowned for displaying with nine, British-built fast-jets and bringing the whole formation together is a key moment in the six-month winter training programme.

The Red Arrows begin training for the forthcoming season almost as soon as the previous year has ended.



For the latest season, full preparations got underway after the team returned from a nine-week, 20,000-mile, tour of the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions supporting UK interests at the end of 2016.

Typically, this winter training starts with small groups of three or four aircraft formations.

Each pilot flies three sorties a day, five days a week, and the formations grow in aircraft number as training progresses.

The occasion saw the team’s trademark Diamond Nine formation flown, among other manoeuvres that will feature in this year’s show.

Squadron Leader David Montenegro, Red 1 and Team Leader, said: “We have flown 13 weeks of intensive training and the result is being able to get 9 aircraft airborne today which is a testament to the perseverance and dedication of the team pilots; tireless and enduring effort of our engineering team; brilliant work from our PR and administrative teams on the squadron and indeed, support from the Station services at RAF Scampton.

“On a personal note, this is the third and final year that I will achieve this milestone and I can say in all honesty that the adrenaline build-up and sense of achievement is as strong as it was in 2015.

“In the pursuit of professional excellence, we now transition to the next phase of training during which we will perfect the display and ensure we maintain the RAF Red Arrows’ benchmark of being a world-leading team, able to represent our Service and our Nations’ interests in all corners of the globe”.



Three of the Red Arrows’ nine pilots are new to the team for 2017.

Flight Lieutenant Dan Lowes, who is Red 3 and a former Typhoon pilot, said: “That was a truly memorable experience. It was an honour and a privilege to have flown in my first Red Arrows 9 ship.

“The training has been tough, and there’s still a long way to go, but it’s great to have achieved our first 9.

“I’m now looking forward to deploying on our spring training camp and working towards PDA.”

These flights involve a thorough brief, debrief and discussion to ensure safety is paramount and the formations are precise.



Winter training in the UK lasts until mid-spring, when the team usually moves overseas to a location with more predictable, settled weather to maximise flying hours and perfect the display. This is known as Exercise Springhawk.

Flight Lieutenant Si Taylor, Red 7, who also previously flew operationally in the Tornado and Typhoon and joins Red 6 to form the 2017 Synchro pair, said: “This feels like it’s happened so fast since we got back from the tour in December.

“It’s a great

feeling to have achieved a significant milestone through some hard graft and dedication throughout the winter months. Hopefully now we can kick on and make the show look incredible for all the crowds in the 2017 Season. I'm really looking forward to it".

The first nine-ship is an important occasion for the whole Squadron – including the ground team, who number more than 100 and comprise technicians, suppliers, drivers, photographers, administrators, operations staff and a public relations department.

Each has a crucial part to play in ensuring the Red Arrows can fly and perform precision displays around the world.

Among those people with a role in today's nine-ship were the technicians on the flightline – responsible for checking the aircraft are safe for flight, assisting the crewing-in of the pilots into the cockpits and marshalling the jets from their parking stands.



Flight Lieutenant Alicia Mason, the team's Junior Engineering Officer responsible for day-to-day engineering issues on the Squadron, and who is also new to the Red Arrows this season, said: "Today has been a superb achievement for all concerned. It's another milestone in our calendar that the groundcrew have been preparing for behind the scenes for the past few weeks.

"Luck was not on our side this week though and we've had a tricky few days with the jets not behaving themselves but I'm proud to say that the team have put in a tremendous performance over the past 2 days working together day and night to ensure that we had 9 serviceable aircraft for the programme this morning. It was great to see the fruits of our labour when all 9 took off and landed safely and the aircrew were able to practice some of their 9-ship manoeuvres. Even some of the groundcrew were able to take a break for a few minutes this morning to come outside and watch part of the first 9-ship practice to show their support and enjoy this moment as a team.

"We can't rest on our

laurels though, there is still much to be done ahead of our deployment to Greece for Exercise SPRINGHAWK. The groundcrew will be busy over the next 4 weeks ensuring that we have 11 serviceable aircraft and equipment prepared and ready to take with us for the duration of the Exercise”.



During Springhawk the team is assessed by senior Royal Air Force officers, with the aim of gaining Public Display Authority.

If this is awarded, the Squadron’s pilots change from green coveralls into their famous red flying suits and the ground crew are allowed to wear their royal blue display coveralls.

The season then officially begins and public performances by the Red Arrows are permitted.

It is hoped the first display to the public in the UK will be on 3 June this year, for the Torbay Airshow, Torbay.

More information about the 2017 season will be release on the Red Arrows website shortly.

For more information about the team, follow @rafredarrows on Twitter, like RAF Red Arrows on Facebook or visit www.raf.mod.uk/reds

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