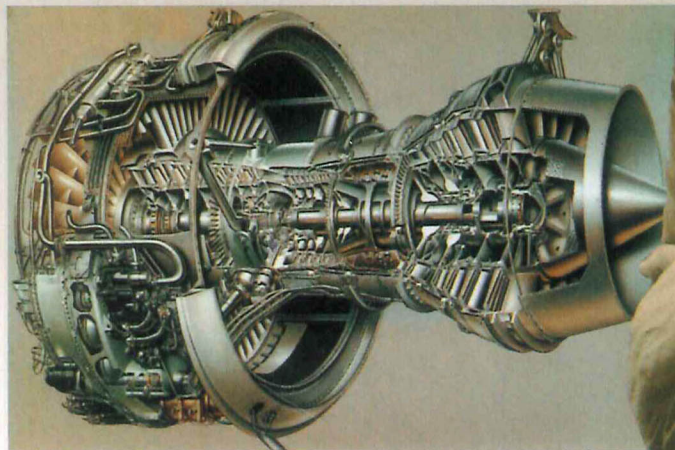
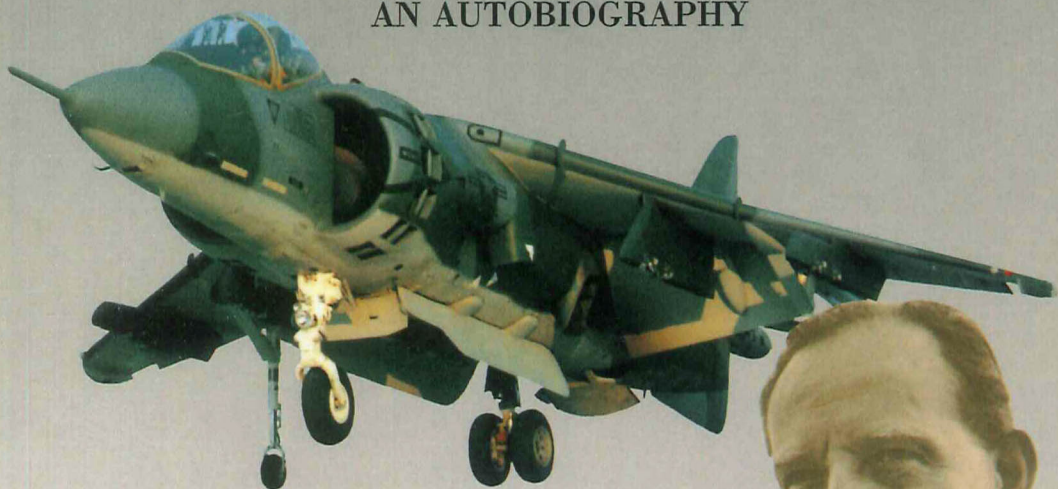


NOT MUCH OF AN ENGINEER

Sir Stanley Hooker

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY



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Foreword

by The Lord Keith of Castleacre

Most laymen regard higher mathematics as a dull subject and consequently suspect that those who practise it must be somewhat sombre and live in a rarefied atmosphere.

Stanley Hooker's life story and the way he has written it clearly disprove this view.

Stanley first came into my life when in October, 1972, I went to Rolls-Royce as Chairman of a company recently rescued from bankruptcy, but still proudly possessing one of the greatest of names. He rapidly became my guide, philosopher and friend. He held my hand, technically, throughout the seven years I was with the company and I shall always be deeply grateful to him.

This brilliant mathematician, who won almost every available scholarship and academic prize, is possessed of a warm and loveable character. He has a capacity for making enduring friendships with all types, kinds and nationalities. A truly modest man, he is generous to a degree. He was the first to give credit to others when things went right; equally the first to assume the blame when things went wrong. As the reader will discover, he also has a ready wit and an excellent sense of humour.

Almost by accident, he became one of the world's most brilliant engineers. His clear and precise mind was combined with the engineering equivalent of green fingers when it came to solving abstruse problems, as he so clearly demonstrated when he led the technical rescue work on the RB211, thereby saving it for the nation following the Rolls-Royce bankruptcy.

If asked to pinpoint his greatest contribution to the nation, I suppose one would start with his work as a supersonic airflow expert, analysing superchargers, thereby giving them improved and more predictable performance. This resulted in the Merlin engine keeping ahead of the Germans, with inestimable benefit to the R.A.F., throughout the war.

Stanley changed the face of the aero-engine business when he introduced Lord Hives to Sir Frank Whittle and persuaded the former that he should take the gas turbine seriously. He then went on to father the design of the Nene engine which was to become the forerunner of the modern gas turbine and which was licensed to the Americans and, foolishly, sold by the Government of the day, to the Russians. Incidentally, Meteors — powered by the Rolls-Royce Welland engine built at Barnoldswick under Stanley's guidance — were first used in action to chase and destroy flying bombs in August 1944.

He was also a supporter and promoter of vectored thrust and played a major part in the development of the Pegasus engine. This enabled Sydney Camm to design the Harrier which demonstrated its outstanding capabilities in the Falklands war.

Stanley has that rare and invaluable facility of making complicated technical matters understandable to the layman. He is the master of the blackboard and chalk and is able to give even people like myself a reasonably clear idea of how the engine works.

This book records how he left Derby to go to Bristol in 1948; how he returned temporarily in 1967; and how he finally became director of engineering at Rolls-Royce in 1971.

I have often wondered how different the course of Rolls-Royce and indeed British high technology engineering might have been if those two outstanding but determined men — Lord Hives and Stanley Hooker — had been a little more flexible and a little less precipitate in September 1948 and had Stanley not left Derby to go to Bristol.

I hope that everyone who reads this book will enjoy it as much as I have done.

Keith of Castleacre
March 1984

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NOT MUCH OF AN ENGINEER

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Within a few months of joining Rolls-Royce, Stanley Hooker, who had never before seen an aero engine, had added thirty per cent more power to the legendary Merlin engine. This was the start of a meteoric career, which in the middle of World War II saw the mature Hooker put in charge of turning the embryonic Whittle turbojet into a production engine for the war. In an amazing twenty months the thrust of Hooker's jets jumped from 1,800 lb to 5,000 lb.

After an emotional break with Rolls-Royce, Hooker joined the Bristol Aeroplane Company in 1949. Here he tugged a rather reluctant company into the jet age, determined to give real competition to Roll-Royce. So successful was he that in 1966 Rolls-Royce decided the best thing to do was to spend £63.6 million and buy its rival.

By this time there was scarcely a single modern British aero engine for which Hooker had not been responsible. By 1966 his main concerns were the propulsion of the Concorde and the Harrier, but there were new men in charge at Derby and Hooker decided to retire on his sixtieth birthday, in 1967.

Little did he think that within four years the mighty firm would plunge into bankruptcy! So important was Rolls that the Government was immediately involved, and it invited Hooker to go to Derby and mastermind the great RB211 programme – the engine that had broken the firm. To say that the result earned him a knighthood is to overlook the action-packed career that came previously.



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