

The 2014 Duxford Airshow

In my many travels I have never been lucky enough to be in a country where an airshow was being held that is relatively easy (*and not too expensive*) to get to. The weather forecast looks good and hopefully everything on the flight schedule will show up. A lot of these aircraft are over sixty years old and do require a fair amount of maintenance.

The cost for the transport and admittance for the day is 75 pounds (\$130) which is not bad considering that allows me travel on the underground rail in London, a return ticket to Cambridge then a free bus to the venue plus admittance.



Avro Vulcan XH558

I have done a fair amount of research on what you need to successfully shoot such events. After reading many forum discussions the tripod is definitely staying home. I will however be taking the monopod and my Wimberly Head as I think the weight of my Canon 1D X & Canon 400mm f2.8 will wear me down during the 3 ½ hours of actual flying sequence. But for those who don't own a monstrous prime do not despair as a 70-200, 150-500 plus extenders will also work. I have seen many fine shots taken with these lenses. (*Here are a couple of websites that have interesting articles that can help you:* <http://www.school-of-digital-photography.com/2013/09/airshow-photography-a-beginners-guide-camera-settings-shooting-techniques-tips-and-tricks.html> & <http://www.richard-seaman.com/Photography/Airshows/>).

As for settings it is dependent upon many factors but if it is a sunny day here are two formulas that you can start with:

- Propeller Driven Aircraft, Aperture: f5.6, ISO: 400, Shutter Speed: $\frac{1}{80}$ to $\frac{1}{125}$
- Jets: Aperture: f5.6, ISO: 400, Shutter Speed: $\frac{1}{1250}$ through to $\frac{1}{4000}$ dependent upon which aircraft.



What an exhausting adventure! Get up early as per usual and leave Mum's place at 07.15 to make my way to King's Cross Station to catch the 08.07 to Cambridge. Already regretting how much gear I am backpacking. Need a Sherpa or get stronger. One thing I had not taken into account was the distance I would have to lug this stuff. All up I had the monopod with a Wimberly Head MkII on top, two bodies (*Canon 1D X & 5D MkII*) plus 2 lens's (*Canon 400mm f2.8L IS USM II & 70-200mm f2.8L IS USM II*) all packed into my Gura Bataflae 30L backpack.

BAC Jet Provost Trainers in Formation

Apparently the best place to take shots is up on the mound near the Land Warfare building which is a long hike from the Entrance. Right so in the gate by 1030 and off on a mission – forced march to the mound. Did I mention the crowds? Well, being a bush baby crowds of people don't really make me happy and the place was packed by nearly 10,000 by the time I got there. Very claustrophobic. No time to gawk as far too many people on the tarmac to take nice shots of the parked planes so pushed on. Make sure you go to the loo before settling into your spot because if you leave your gear to mark that spot you could return to find nothing.

Spitfires -Battle of Britain Flight





The mound is already crowded by the time I get there. Obviously I am not the only person who has done a bit of research. Opted not to be on the mound but at the fence after some friendly advice from another Canon shooter (*trustworthy people they are not like them Nikon shooters!!!*). This young Spanish guy was sporting almost identical gear to me (*1D X & 300 f2.8*) and was very knowledgeable as he spends his summer following the airshow circuit through the UK, France and Spain.

CANSO-PBY-5A-Catalina

So all set by 11am but a long, long wait as the airshow does not really begin until 2pm. Oh and did I tell you there is no place to sit. Given the size of the backpack I had that day a chair may have broken the camel's back but it would have been good. A couple of time I left my gear to mark my spot and went and lay down on the mound about ten metres away to give my legs a rest.

Finally the action starts and you become like a one armed paper hanger in a strong breeze trying to remember all the stuff that you have learnt as the show keeps flipping between jets and prop aircraft which require two totally different settings. And don't forget if you shoot right that is into the sun. The weather gods conspire and have the wind coming straight down the runway towards you which is good as that means all aircraft are going to come in to land and take-off from your end but the sun is crossing at that end of the runway as well. Even allowing +1 stop of compensation most shots facing the sun are terribly overexposed but if I added 3 or 4 stops for that end everything at the other end would be pitch black.



Breitling Wing Walkers Display Team

Tough life being a photographer at this type of event. I have a new appreciation for some of the other great images I have seen posted from airshows.



By 17.30 the arms have grown weak from firing off nearly 3500 shots and filling 4 32Gb cards full of raw files. I am glad I shot in RAW as this was the only saviour for the overexposed shots. If it had been in JPEG then nearly 75% of the shots would have been trash straight away. The next issue was trying to get a prop plane doing 300 mph in sharp focus whilst keeping the shutter speed no faster than $\frac{1}{250}$ sec (*this is to keep the props from freezing which would look silly*). So even more duds for a) shaky b) missing bits c) too close to the edge of the frame d) wrong focal point. It was much easier shooting the jets with high speeds $\frac{1}{3200}$ sec at f8 (*some of the aircraft are big*).

DeHavilland Dragon Rapide on the final approach into Duxford

The only disappointing part of the whole show was that I could not get a ticket for the second day as they were sold out. So I never got to see the two Lancaster bombers flying together nor the Red Arrows. Given that there were 24,000 people the second day and my dislike of a large crowd maybe I should count myself as lucky. Finally managed to get home at 9pm that night absolutely knackered but had a great time. I would do this again in a heartbeat but would definitely re-asses how much gear I would cart. In the end I rarely used the monopod and Wimberley Head (4kg) nor the second body and the 70-200 (*only 50 shots*). The two extenders never came out of the bag.



RAF Rescue Sea King



RAF Rescue Practice



Scramble! Scramble! Scramble! Spitfires into action

Next episode will be London by Night II shoot around London Bridge.