

## TRENDS RACING JETS



### RAF-style training in a fighter jet is a propeller-head's dream, writes Matthew Stibbe

BLASTING THROUGH THE air close to the speed of sound, climbing up above the airliners, seeing the curvature of the earth or performing aerobatics and formation flying like the Red Arrows... it's the ultimate extreme sport. And a jet like this is more accessible than you think.

Mike Garfield is director of MCS Arabia, a company that helps people do business in the Middle East. A self-confessed victim of "compulsive flying disorder," he also runs the

Swords Aviation syndicate, which owns two Jet Provosts, based at North Weald airfield, Essex. In RAF service until the early 1990s, this high-performance trainer can fly up to 644kph.

"It's very demanding to fly; intellectually and physically," says Garfield. "It takes your flying skills to the next level." He describes formation flying with the group's ex-RAF instructors: "You could fly your entire life as a private pilot and never see anything like this."

Buying a new Jet Provost might cost £50,000 or more, but joining a syndicate brings the capital cost down to just £4,000. There is a monthly overhead contribution of £120 and it costs around £350 an hour to fly, including fuel.

To get started, you'll need a private pilot's licence and around 100 hours of basic flying experience. There is an RAF-style syllabus and it will take an extra 10 to 20 hours with an instructor before you can go solo on the jet.

The next step for the budding top gun is the Hawker Hunter. This was a frontline fighter in the 1960s and there are several dozen in private hands. One belongs to a syndicate run by Barry Prescott. G-BXFI, or Fox One to its pilots, is a rare two-seater version



which means that instructor and pilot sit next to one another. "I live and breathe aeroplanes," says Prescott, who founded Avialec, a distributor of aviation components.

"I've always had a passion for flying since I saw Neville Duke test-flying Hunters at Dunsfold in 1953 when I was 13."

The Hunter is a more expensive plane to own and fly. A share in the Fox One syndicate is £25,000 and it costs around £1,000 an hour to fly. But Prescott says: "Try to imagine anything else that can do 925kph, go up to 40,000 feet and come downhill faster than the speed of sound."

