

The Gazelle Squadron Display Team

Information and Overview



Squadron Overview



Supported by CAA approved maintenance organisation Falcon Aviation Ltd, the Gazelle Squadron Display Team was formed in 2014 to continue the legacy of one of the longest serving aircraft in British military service, the Westland Gazelle.

Currently performing a two aircraft display at summer air shows across the UK, the squadron also provides aircraft for static display to enable young and old alike the experience of seeing a 'live' helicopter close-up. Additionally, the squadron provides static display aircraft to smaller private events including school and village fetes whilst supporting our charities especially at Easter and Christmas. On occasion we have been honoured to step in and offer support to World War 2 veterans (please see the links below).

<https://www.kentononline.co.uk/maidstone/news/funeral-for-ww2-glider-pilot-184730/>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1764594236939989>

The Squadron consists of around 35 volunteers, including both civilian, current, and former military pilots, engineers, and ground crew, many of whom have performed with the Army Air Corps Eagles and Royal Navy's Sharks display teams. All the team volunteer their time and skills throughout the year to ensure the aircraft are displayed in prime condition and more importantly are operated safely. Operating from a private airfield in Oxfordshire, the current fleet of display aircraft originates from the Army Air Corps, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Royal Marines.

The team adheres to a traditional military structure consisting of three flights - display pilots, non-display pilots and ground crew all of whom are trained in specific and specialist roles. All team members are first aid trained and adhere to a strict health and safety code ensuring that the public enjoy the Gazelle experience whilst remaining safe.



About the Gazelle



Specifications

Crew:	2
Capacity:	3 Passengers
Length:	11.97 m (39 ft. 0 in)
Main rotor diameter:	10.5 m (34 ft. 6 in)
Height:	3.15 m (10 ft. 3 in)
Main rotor area:	86.5 m ² (931 ft ²)
Empty weight:	908 kg (2,002 lb.)
Gross weight:	1,800 kg (3,970 lb.)
Power plant:	1 × Turbomeca Astazou IIIA turboshaft, 440 kW (590 hp)

Performance

Maximum speed:	310 km/h (193 mph)
Cruising speed:	264 km/h (164 mph)
Range:	670 km (416 miles)
Service ceiling:	5,000 m (16,405 ft.)
Rate of climb:	9 m/s (1,770 ft./min)

The SA.341 Gazelle is a single turbine engine, five-seat helicopter originally designed by Sud Aviation for the French Army who required a lightweight utility helicopter to replace the aging Aérospatiale Alouette III. Part of the 1967 Franco-British agreement to licence Aérospatiale designs that included the Puma & Lynx, from 1972 to 1996, Westland Helicopters built nearly 300 of the type, with 282 delivered to the British military.

The original SA.340 first flew on the 7th of April 1967, with the conventional tail rotor of the Alouette II with the second prototype introducing the distinctive 'Fenestron' tail rotor in 1968. Both civilian and military versions were developed with the military types used primarily for surveillance, reconnaissance, and training. The Gazelle was also assembled by SOKO in Yugoslavia and ABHCO in Egypt and was used globally for many other uses inc. Light attack, Anti-tank, Anti-helicopter, Light and VIP transport. The later SA.342 was fitted with the more powerful Astazou XIV engine. The UK variant entered service in 1974 and in total, almost 1800 units were built before production ended in 1996.

UK Variants

The Gazelle saw service with the Royal Navy including the Royal Marines, Royal Air Force and Army Air Corps, in four different variants

- Westland SA.341B - AH.1 Army Air Corps & Royal Marines (Commandos)
- Westland SA.341C - HT.2 Royal Navy (Training)
- Westland SA.341D - HT.3 Royal Air Force (Training)
- Westland SA.341E - HCC.4 Royal Air Force (32 'Royal' Squadron - V.I.P)

Battle Honours

Army Air Corps and Royal Marine Gazelles were the only aircraft deployed overseas in combat operations. Although designed as an observation and reconnaissance helicopter, Op CORPORATE, aka The Falklands War saw the fitting of machine guns and rocket launchers although neither were used in anger.

- Op BANNER, Northern Ireland 1967 - 2007
- Op CORPORATE, Falklands 1982
- Op GRANBY, Gulf War I 1990 - 1992
- Op GRAPPLE, Balkans 1993 - 2003
- Op JOINT ENDEAVOUR, Bosnia 1996
- Op GUARDIAN, Kosovo 1999
- OP BARRAS, Sierra Leone 2000
- Op FINGAL, Afghanistan 2002
- Op TELIC, Iraq 2003 - 2008
- Op HERRICK, Afghanistan 2006 - 2014

Did you know? & Fun Facts

- In UK military service for 48 years (due to leave Army service in 2025)
- In production for 24 years
- First helicopter to feature a 'Fenestron' tail instead of a conventional tail rotor.
- The only rotary wing aircraft to serve with all three arms of the British armed forces
- The SA341G was the first helicopter to obtain the American single-pilot IFR Cat 1 approval
- Used in approximately 23 countries
- In Afghanistan Gazelle's couldn't fly between 11am & 11pm during summer because the heat damaged the engine
- The original price was £40,000
- Reputed to still be the fastest single engine helicopter built
- Nick Name – 'The whistling chicken leg'

The Fleet



Airworthy Aircraft

Gazelle XW849/G-CBSK

Aircraft type:	Westland SA.341D Gazelle HT.3
First Flew:	1982
Construction number:	1914
Military serial No:	ZB627
Civilian registration:	G-CBSK

ZB627 was procured as an RAF training aircraft flying for the first time on the 18th of May 1982. Delivered to the Royal Air Force on July 13th of the same year, it served primarily with 2FTS at RAF Shawbury, the RAF's rotary training establishment in Shropshire, and with 7 Squadron based at RAF Odiham in Hampshire. Used for night vision reconnaissance sorties, ZB627 was painted all over in olive drab - the only Gazelle to wear such a scheme.

Flown back to RAF Shawbury on the 17th of September 1997, for storage and onward sale, ZB627 was purchased by London Helicopter Centres Ltd and registered as G-CBSK on the 6th of June 2002 and repainted back in to his 2FTS colour scheme, the scheme it has retained throughout its civilian life. It was then sold to Knoland Aviation Ltd, before being purchased by Falcon Aviation at Bourne Park and registered to them on the 2nd of November 2011.



Gazelle XX436/G-ZZLE

Aircraft type: Westland SA.341C Gazelle HT.2

First Flew: 1976

Construction number: 1402

Military serial: XX436

Civilian registration: G-ZZLE

Built in 1976 as an SA.341C (Gazelle HT.2), at the Westland Factory in Yeovil, Somerset, XX436 first flew on the 21st of July. Delivered to RNAY (Royal Naval Aircraft Yard) Wroughton on the 19th of February 1977 for storage, it was finally delivered to RNAS Culdrose in Cornwall on the 25th of July, serving for 26 years in a training role with 705 Naval Air Squadron (NAS) wearing squadron code CU/(5)39.

From the 19th of June to 28th of July 1978, XX436 flew as part of The Tri-Service Helicopter Team in the British Helicopter Championships, and in the August, along with XX431, was due to take part in the World Helicopter Championships in Vitebsk in the Soviet Union. Both received special tri-service markings and the 'Royal Navy' titles hidden with white stickers! However, the UK government withdrew their participation on political grounds.

On the 21st of May 1997, XX436 was flown to RAF Shawbury in Shropshire for long term storage until being demobbed on the 16th of May 2002. Sold into civilian use, XX436 was initially painted in Royal Marines grey and green camouflage however in 2015 underwent a complete rebuild and transformation back to his original 705NAS scheme of bright red and white, complete with Royal Navy "Sharks" display team markings.



Gazelle XZ939/G-CLGO

Aircraft type: Westland SA.341C Gazelle HT.2/3

First Flew: 1978

Construction number: 1750

Military serial: XZ939

Civilian registration: G-CLGO

XZ939 first flew on the 20th of September 1978 and was delivered into Royal Navy service on the 2nd of November. It is uncertain whether she joined the Navy's helicopter training unit 705 Naval Air Squadron (NAS) based at RNAS Culdrose, as she was converted into a HT.3 and transferred to Royal Airforce Shawbury in 1979.

In 1991 XZ939 was transferred to the ETPS (Empire Test Pilots' School) at Boscombe Down where she wore the famous 'Raspberry Ripple' colour scheme. Modified with the addition of extensive flight test instrumentation including the 'proboscis' she still wears, she formed part of the evaluation fleet. As part of the ETPS 'QinetiQ' fleet, XZ939 was repainted in the distinctive blue and white livery she wears today. Withdrawn from use in December 2018, XZ939 was registered on the civil register as G-CLGO in June 2019



Under Restoration



Gazelle XW849/TBC

Aircraft type: Westland SA.341B Gazelle AH.1

First Flew: 1972

Construction number: 1016

Military serial: XW849 'Navy Charlie Golf'

Civilian registration: TBC

Westland Gazelle XW849 was part of the first batch of 60 Westland Gazelles ordered by the Ministry of Defence on the 21st of August 1970. One of 29 AH1's built for the Army Air Corp, XW849 was the 16th Westland production Gazelle and 8th manufactured for the British UK military. As an AH1, XW849 was equipped with an Astazou IIIN engine; 'Nightsun' searchlight, Decca Doppler 80 radar and automatic chart display.

XW849 took its first flight on the 17th of December 1972 and was delivered to RAF Tern on the 2nd of May 1973 prior to the type entering service on the 6th of July 1974. Serving with 3 Commando Brigade Air Squadron and 847 Naval Air Squadron (Royal Marines) for the greater part of her life she saw active service in Operation Telic aka the Second Gulf War. Whilst this was her first true active service, she is reputed to have been reserved for service in the Falklands War but was never called.

Her service life came to an end when she was transferred into storage at RAF Shawbury on the 21st of February 2005 and then to the Gazelle Depth Support Hub (GDSH) at Middle Wallop on the 8th of January 2010 for reduction to spares which left her in a sorry state. Finally, in December 2013, she was bought by the Gazelle Military Helicopter Trust as a bare shell for restoration and static display.



Gazelle XZ321/G-CDNS

Aircraft type: Westland SA.341B Gazelle AH.1

First Flew: 1977

Construction number: 1614

Military serial: XZ321

Civilian registration: G-CDNS

Like XW849, XZ321 is a true warbird. Taking its first flight on the 9th of March 1977 and being delivered on the 13th of April, XZ321 initially served with AAC 2 Flight, 6 Flight and then 656 Squadron. Part of the Army Air Corps for 28 years XZ321 served with distinction in Operation Corporate aka 'the Falklands War'.

On the 8th of May 1982 XZ321 and 656 Squadron's other Gazelles, including XZ321, were loaded on the Nordic Ferry. Anchoring off San Carlos settlement on the 3rd of June, in high winds and almost continuous rain, the Gazelles flew off to Clam Valley.

The Gazelles moved to Goose Green on the 5th of June, and on the 7th helped with the evacuation of casualties from RFA Sir Galahad and RFA Sir Tristram. The squadron moved to Fitzroy on the 9th of June with 5 Infantry Brigade's headquarters. By the 10th of June all 656 squadron Gazelles were fitted with 68mm rockets and test firing was conducted in Choisuel Sound. On the 13th of June, the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards attacked Mount Tumbledown with 656 Squadron in support flying casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) sorties. The 14th of June saw the squadron engaged in continuous calls for CASEVAC flights, urgent replenishment missions and liaison work in support of The Second Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (2 PARA) who had moved off Wireless Ridge and were advancing on Stanley.

XZ321 remained in the Falklands until December 1983, then returned to the UK for storage next seeing service in Northern Ireland in 1989 where she remained for most of her remaining service life. XZ321 is currently under restoration to flying condition and will be painted in the desert colours of 4 Regiment who supported the Desert Rats amongst other brigades in the first Gulf War.



Members Aircraft



Gazelle XZ934/G-CBSI

Aircraft type: Westland SA.341D Gazelle HT.3

First Flew: 1978

Construction number: 1736

Military serial: XZ934

Civilian registration: G-CBSI

XZ934, a Gazelle HT.3, first flew on 27th June 1978 at Westland Helicopters Weston-Super-Mare factory. Initially placed in storage at RNAY Wroughton on 10 August 1978, after 8 months was finally delivered to the RAF 2 Flying Training School at RAF Shawbury on 19 June 1979. As with most of the RAF Gazelles it spent all its life training helicopter pilots at 2FTS and wore the squadron code 'U' during this time.

Assigned to storage at RAF Shawbury on the 17th of September 1997, it was sold into the private sector on June 6th, 2002, and allocated the CAA civilian registration G-CBSI. In 2014 it was repainted in the 32 squadron VIP colour scheme worn by Gazelle HCC.4s whilst in service. 'Sierra India' is now owned by Peter Unwin, a stalwart supporter of the Gazelle Squadron and is a regular feature at UK air shows.



Our Charities



Apart from striving to continue the legacy of the Gazelle, the Gazelle Squadron Display Team members have adopted children's and veterans' charities and actively support them through fund raising at air shows, merchandise sales, special appearances and providing the airborne transport for Father Christmas and the Easter Bunny!



Naomi House & Jack's place hospices support families from seven counties in southern England including Hampshire and Wiltshire. They offer a full palliative care service that includes respite, emergency, and end of life care for life-limited and life-threatened children and young adults from birth and into their later years.

Naomi House is a purpose-built children's hospice that provides a homely environment to children and young people with life-limiting conditions. They provide individualised specialist care and much needed respite for the whole family, enabling them to feel refreshed, rested and supported through the good days, difficult days and last days.

Jack's place is their hospice for 16 years and upwards and has been specifically designed to meet the needs of young adults. It is the only purpose-built hospice for teenagers and young adults in the region and gives life-limited young people the privacy and dignity they deserve.

<https://www.naomihouse.org.uk/>



Julia's House is not a typical children's hospice, it provides practical and emotional support for families caring for a child with a life-limiting or life-threatening condition by providing frequent and regular support in their

own homes, in the community or at one of their hospices. In May 2017 Julia's House opened a new hospice in Devizes, Wiltshire and the Gazelle Squadron is delighted to be able to help them to continue to provide a high standard of care.

<https://www.juliashouse.org/>



The Gazelle Squadron are proud to support the Army Benevolent Fund better known as the 'ABF The Soldiers' Charity'. The ABF is the Army's national charity, providing lifetime support for soldiers, former soldiers, and their families.

The ABF awarded grants to individuals and families and provides essential funding to leading charities and organisations that support the Army family. With a clear vision that simply states, 'All soldiers, veterans and their immediate families should have the opportunity to avoid hardship and enjoy independence and dignity'. The ABF provides help with housing, education, and training for employment for soldiers and veterans of all ages. We are there for older veterans and their widows or widowers when they find themselves lonely or isolated.

<https://soldierscharity.org/>

Contacts and social media

Follow the Gazelle Squadron on



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