

FAST JETS IN WICHITA
*If You Got the Bucks,
They Got the Jets!*
By Walt Shiel



Jet warbirds represent the crème de la crème within the international warbird community and Air Capitol Warbirds of Wichita, Kansas, has over a dozen kerosene-burners on hand in some phase of restoration. Teamed with Fulcrum Inc. of Ontario, Canada, they're rebuilding and marketing everything from the diminutive A-37 to high-speed macho machines. But if you haven't heard of them, you're not alone.

“It's the best-kept secret in Wichita,” says Kirby Duffy, President of Fulcrum Inc. Duffy and his wife Angela established the company in 1992 in Ayr, Ontario, as an aviation marketing and management firm. In 1997, Ken Bryant moved from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Wichita and founded Air Capitol Warbirds to continue the pursuit of his passion -- jet warbird restoration. These two companies, half a continent and one national border apart, soon came together to form a dynamic strategic partnership. Duffy says, “We consider Fulcrum Inc. and Air Capitol Warbirds to be sister companies.”

Fulcrum handles the marketing, some of the flight operations, assists with aircraft acquisitions, and owns some of the jets scheduled for restoration. Air Capitol provides the restoration experience, facilities, and

know-how. To maintain their close-knit cooperation, Fulcrum maintains its US office in the Air Capitol hangar on Wichita's Jabarra Airport.

The stealthy existence of Air Capitol Warbirds, in the midst of what is known as the Air Capital of the World, has been partly due to a desire to control the likely influx of tire-kickers and gawkers that prominence might bring, something Duffy and Bryant worried would interfere with their typically heavy workload. But with a plethora of projects in-work or on the horizon, they've decided to “go public” and let the world know about their work and their passion.

Air Capitol's hangar overflows with tantalizing projects in various stages of completion, with even more exotic jets on the way. Currently, they are putting the finishing touches on a McDonnell Douglas TA-4J Skyhawk for the CEO of a major US corporation, who prefers to remain anonymous. How he expects to fly a Skyhawk in and out of civilian fields without anyone noticing is a mystery in itself! Bryant says they invested about 11,000 hours in the restoration and the only major work remaining is the personalized paint scheme chosen by its owner. Air Capitol will deliver the “Scooter,” as the A-4 has been known affectionately for years, with modern avionics and has arranged for initial test flights by a combat-experienced Navy A-4 pilot. Bryant has four more TA-4Js in work plus an A-4C, his personal pet project.



The Cessna A-37 Dragonfly is as popular in the US as Down Under even though they seem to be more rare. The Fulcrum/Air Capitol team stands ready to help rectify that situation with two of the breed in active restoration and another soon to arrive. The first buyer with a spare half-million US dollars will be able to mount up and fly one away.

Air Capitol also has a beautiful Northrop T-38 Talon restored to NASA standards, including the J85-13C engine upgrade. These are the engines used on the F-5A, providing an extra five percent thrust kick. Bryant says the Talon was missing a lot of parts when they started work but, 12,000 restoration hours later, is now flying and available in a lustrous deep blue paint job. It has not been kept under wraps; an Air Force T-38

instructor flew the Talon to both Sun 'N' Fun and Oshkosh this year. For a while, Bryant owned two of the four USAF Thunderbird T-38s that crashed during a team practice back in 1984. He says they were in amazingly good condition considering how fast they were going when they hit the ground, but he recently sold them both.



If you'd rather have a meaner version of the Talon, Air Capitol has an F-5B flight-ready with only 2,800 total hours on the airframe. A previous Air Capitol F-5 restoration is now based in Tulsa. Kirby Duffy acquired a CF-5A, which is waiting for a buyer to make a down payment so restoration can begin in earnest.

You might think that A-37s, A-4s, F-5s, and T-38s would be enough to keep Fulcrum and Air Capitol busy, but they keep finding ways to acquire ever more exotic hardware.

Ever felt the need to slip some of those surly bonds at twice the speed of sound? Want something truly exotic? How about a Saab Draken? In Swedish, Draken means Dragon and these go-fast Saabs are definitely fire-breathers. The Fulcrum/Air Capitol team now owns a single-seat F-35 and a two-seat TF-35, both ex-Royal Danish Air Force. Aeromarine Dynamics previously owned and flew the single-holer, which has been seen on American television in a Miller Genuine Draft beer commercial in connection with the Indianapolis 500 auto race. Although it has not had an annual inspection in a couple of years and has just been sitting, Bryant expects it to be a fairly easy restoration. The two-seater was privately owned but, following an engine flameout, the owner ejected. Luckily, but embarrassing for the owner, the jet simply glided to a gear-up landing and, although in need of a good bit of work, was not severely damaged. Around a million US dollars could put one in your own hangar.



As impressive as their current stable sounds, Duffy and Bryant show no signs of relaxing their never-ending search for interesting jet warbirds projects. There are several even more exciting projects being negotiated at

the moment, but Duffy prefers to keep quiet about them until things firm up. However, Bryant admitted that they do own a Lockheed Martin F-16 that, if a buyer with “deep pockets” shows up, is ready to be returned to flying status. This F-16 was another victim of a gear-up landing that also did not cause excessive damage.

Where do these guys find the jets to refurbish? They're cagey when asked, but it's clear they have excellent sources and want to protect them to maintain their competitive edge. As for the F-16, Bryant would rather not say how they got it, although he insists it's completely legal. He says, “If [the government] can't figure out how I got it, they can't change the rules to prevent me from doing it again.”

The US government recently announced additional restrictions on the importation of supersonic military hardware but this did not affect the acquisition of the Drakens. Duffy explains, “The Drakens were brought in before the [government] ban. Parts are not a problem as these aircraft will be supported by Air Capitol Warbirds, which has a large inventory of parts. The aircraft also have some common parts that are on the open market as well.”

Duffy has been involved with aviation for many years, with extensive experience in marketing, advertising, training, public relations, and airshow coordination. Bryant has 28 years of assembly and maintenance experience on high-performance fighters, including the F-16, F-111, A-7, EA-6, and F-4. Although Air Capitol and its 10-member staff has provided maintenance services for heavy hitters like Learjet, Gulfstream, Mitsubishi, and Hawker, they claim to be the only company dedicated exclusively to the restoration of military jet aircraft.



The Fulcrum/Air Capitol team will sell their aircraft as projects, for owners who want to accomplish or supervise the work themselves, or as fully restored, turn-key aircraft including spare parts, manuals, and flight training ... right down to the flight suit and helmet. Duffy insists that an Air

Capitol finished project is “like it just came off the assembly line, but it will be even better!”

As for what lured Kirby Duffy into this challenging kind of work, he says, “If you love warbirds and you love jets then you will love to work here. The best part is to see them come in the hangar as 'nothing' on a flatbed truck and then see them fly out of here as a pristine machine. Like an angel with new wings!”



Expect even more from this unique bi-national marriage of restoration expertise and marketing savvy. As Duffy proudly proclaims, “We work together as a team, and the customer wins.”

For more information, check out their web site at <http://www.airwarbirds.com> or email Wayne Alexander, Director of Sales, at webejets@gte.net .

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