

RIAT May Provide Best View of F-35 International Debut

AinOnline

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The Royal International Air Tattoo (RIAT) will again be held immediately before the Farnborough Air Show. RAF Fairford is expected to host more than 200 aircraft, including the F-35s that will display at both shows. (Photo: RIAT)

Those planning to visit the Farnborough International airshow next month who are keen to get a good look at the headline F-35 stealth fighter should consider attending the Royal International Air Tattoo (RIAT) at RAF Fairford, which takes place the weekend prior (July 12 and 13). The three F-35B Lightning IIs that are flying to the UK for next month's events will be based at Fairford throughout, and none will be on static display at Farnborough. Instead, the jet will be flown daily from Fairford to display at Farnborough—except for the Wednesday and Thursday trade days—when Royal Air Force display pilot Sqn Ldr Hugh Nichols will be taking rest leave.

RIAT has again attracted substantial sponsorship from the aerospace industry, with 18 companies taking hospitality chalets on the flight line. Some of them, including Northrop Grumman, are not participating at Farnborough. Guests at RIAT will include senior leadership from many air arms, who will attend an Air Chiefs Conference in London organized by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) on July 9 and 10, before going to RIAT and Farnborough. RIAT "has a valuable role in supporting international defense diplomacy,"

according to ACM Sir Andrew Pulford, the Royal Air Force chief. Another 12 companies are sponsoring RIAT in other ways. BAE Systems is the headline sponsor.

The Red Arrows are celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, and the RIAT organizers are offering tickets to a "Pit Day" that provides special access to the team on Friday, July 11. The show is usually open to the public only on the weekend. More than 200 military and civilian aircraft will be appearing at RIAT. They include seven formation aerobatic teams and some aircraft that will subsequently fly on to Farnborough, such as the Beechcraft T-6 Texan and King Air 350; Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornet; Boeing P-8 Poseidon; Grob G120TP; and Textron Airland Scorpion.

The three F-35Bs will arrive in the UK from NAS Patuxent River on July 1. An F-35 flypast of the UK Queen Elizabeth II aircraft carrier naming ceremony at Rosyth in Scotland on July 4 has not yet been confirmed. The flying displays at RIAT and Farnborough are the jet's first international outing.

As if RIAT and Farnborough were not enough, aviation enthusiasts will also be flocking to Duxford near Cambridge for Europe's largest gathering of vintage warbirds. The annual Flying Legends airshow takes place there on July 12 and 13.