FARNBOROUGH SHOWS HOW UK REMAINS AEROSPACE PIONEER

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The UK may lack an independent aircraft-building industry these days, with the famed constructors of the early jet age long gone or subsumed, but its aerospace industry continues to be a major global player.

So while the Farnborough air show is very much a global stage, it is worth remembering that it also serves as a vital shop window for the UK's home-grown talents.

Until very recently, and the post-Brexit vote plunge in the value of sterling, the UK was vying with France to have the second-largest aerospace manufacturing sector in the world behind the USA. It may be smaller now in pure dollar terms, but that should not diminish the worth of the industry's output.

At one end of the spectrum there are the likes of Rolls-Royce, whose engines account for a significant value percentage of a commercial aircraft's price. The company's Derby roots mean it remains a cornerstone of the country's future aerospace manufacturing and – critically – research and development activities. Wings are another key part of the UK's aerospace fabric, thanks to the production facilities of Airbus and Bombardier in Broughton and Belfast, respectively.

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BAE Systems is a leading light in the defence sector. Export sales of the Eurofighter Typhoon, in which it is one of three industrial partners, continue to be made, and company officials are confident that more deals will follow.

The much-anticipated arrival in the UK of Lockheed Martin's F-35 ushers in a new generation, and is also good news for BAE, which provides around 15% of each Lightning II built.

But to focus solely on these industry giants – who have substantial operations outside of this sceptered isle – would do a disservice to the sprawling supply chain that feeds them. A whole network of second- and third-tier manufacturing and consultancy businesses provide goods and services to an industry which had a £31.5 billion ($40.8 billion) turnover last year.

The UK has not built a commercial airliner since the last BAe 146 regional jet was completed in the early years of this century, but its technology has been key to producing the F-35, and is on board other first-time visitors to Farnborough, like the Airbus A320neo, Boeing 737 Max and Embraer's E190-E2 and KC-390.

The hard part of the UK's shock divorce from the EU has yet to come. But that must not be allowed to hurt the long-term potential of a nationally essential sector. So it will be business as usual at Farnborough.

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