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A Spitfire over the skies of east Kent, seen from one of Action Stations' air tours

Go nose to nose with Spitfires

HELICOPTER tours that fly just metres from the Second World War's most iconic aircraft have begun taking off from Kent International Airport.

Action Stations is using a fleet of choppers based at Manston to transport passengers to the skies above Dover, where they are treated to an airborne display by either a Spitfire or a Hurricane.

The stunts take place in the same skies that saw the Battle of Britain fought 69 years ago.

Stephen Burt, company director, said: "I was born shortly after the end of the Second World War but I've been fascinated by military aircraft ever since I made my first Airfix model and read through the history on the box."

"The Spitfire and the Hurricane were two of the most iconic aircraft ever built and they have a magical draw that I'm sure will attract people to Kent for these flights."

"The skies above the county are where the Spitfire in particular

really proved itself and we're providing a unique opportunity to see this magnificent aircraft in its natural setting."

The single pilot Spitfire used by Action Stations is one of only 26 still running and is kept at the Imperial War Museum, Duxford, as part of its historic aircraft collection.

The BM597 model, built at Castle Bromwich, near Birmingham, in 1942, and repaired after a landing accident at RAF Valley, Anglesey, costs a staggering

£27 a minute to run. It has a top speed of 370mph and a range of 470 miles.

Action Stations' first public flight took place on Tuesday, September 15, to coincide with this year's Battle of Britain Day.

Flight Lieutenant Charlie Brown, an RAF flying instructor who piloted the Spitfire for the demonstration, said: "It's one of the most fun but also one of the most challenging things I've ever done."

"It's fantastic to fly above Dover,

with all its historical importance. From a few thousand feet, you realise just what a small patch of sky those brave chaps were defending during the war."

The tours, which use helicopters provided by Merlin Way-based Sky Charter, will run until the end of October and are expected to resume in March 2010.

■ **For more information or to book a tour, visit www.goactionstations.co.uk or call Stephen Burt on 01227 721929.**

Barrel-rolls and loops in the sky

by **Martin Jefferies**
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WEIRD and wonderful assignments are occupational hazards for any journalist.

Jumping on board a helicopter from an overcast, windswept Manston and flying to the picturesque White Cliffs of Dover is one such task.

Imagine being chased by a Spitfire as you do so and watching as it loops and barrel-rolls within touching distance.

Stephen Burt's new venture, Action Stations, offers you an experience like no other.

It is a thrill for all air enthusiasts, who can fly nose to tail with one of the most spectacular wartime aircraft this country has ever seen.

And for those with only a fleeting interest in air travel, the breathtaking views of the Kent countryside and coastline will leave you itching to return to the skies the moment you land.

Stephen Burt is not sure whether his tour flights will take off. I predict they will be flying high for many years to come.



Stephen Burt, director of Action Stations, which offers people aerial views of Spitfires and Hurricanes



Flt Lt Charlie Brown, an RAF flying instructor who piloted the Spitfire for the demonstration