



AeroPerspectives' INFLUENCERS
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Lifetime of Achievement

An Interview with Alan Peaford, Aerocomm

*Publisher / Editor - Arabian Aerospace, African Aerospace,
ADS Advance, Pocket Guide to Business Aircraft*



“If you have enthusiasm, you write better.”

“I got the bug, and once you get the bug you don't want to leave.” The ‘bug,’ in Alan Peaford's case, is a passion for aviation, and he's been infected now for 26 years since his communications company won a contract to produce show daily editions for *Flight International* at the Farnborough Airshow, Paris, and other major aerospace industry events.

Alan has won five Aerospace Journalist of the Year awards and was presented a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Aerospace Media at Royal Aeronautical Society.

He is currently Chairman of Aerocomm Ltd., a UK-based media consultancy, and serves as Editor-in-Chief of *Arabian Aerospace* and *African Aerospace* magazines.

He also frequently chairs events such as Aviation Africa and the Isle of Man Aviation Conference and appears on *Sky News*, the *BBC* and *Al Jazeera* as an industry pundit. Alan's comprehensive [Pocket Guide to Business Aircraft](#) is in its 11th edition.

Actor-Turned-Journalist

The young Peaford was acting in a play in London's West End when he was offered an opportunity to attend journalism college – “a bit of divine intervention, I think” – and in 1972 headed to the Middle East where he edited national daily newspapers in Kuwait and Bahrain.

During that time, he worked with legendary *Sunday Times* editor Harold Evans¹, who emphasised keeping writing brief. “One thought, one sentence,” Alan recalls Evans lecturing. “Don't use three words when you can use one. Don't put in long words that people have to go to the dictionary to look up. Keep it simple, and then it communicates.” Peaford says he “too often sees people trying to be wordy, to be clever. If it gets overly complicated, my attention span disappears off, and if it happens to me it must happen to people who are not 100% living, breathing and eating the particular subject they're writing about.”

After returning to the UK, Alan spent eight years in corporate communications at British Petroleum (BP), then led a turnaround of Charles Barker Communications, which produced publications for Accenture, BP, British Airways, Qatar Airways, and won the Reed Business Information contract for the *Flight* show dailies. Peaford led a buyout of Barker and rebranded it as Trident Communications.

After selling Trident in 2004, Alan was on a forced two-year non-compete hiatus. He used that time to create the first *Pocket Guide*.

A commission project to produce a commemorative book for the 10th Dubai Airshow in collaboration with the Times Group and Mark Brown led to the 2009 launch of *Arabian Aerospace*, followed by *African Aerospace* in 2012. They also produce *Advance*, a quarterly journal for ADS, the UK aerospace and defence association which hosts the Farnborough Airshow.

Enthusiasm is Essential

To Peaford, the essential element for good writing is enthusiasm. “If you have enthusiasm, you write better. If you really want to know everything there is about a particular subject, that enthusiasm comes out in your copy. As long as someone is moderately competent, it's not hard to teach them the mechanics of writing. But you can't teach enthusiasm.”

He's concerned that there's a shortage in aviation ... of young journalists. Initially, during job interviews, Alan says, “one of the drivers is the opportunity to travel, and they think the first couple of trips are great. Nice hotels. Swimming pool.” But then the reality sets in of eight hours on an airplane, followed by 10-hour work days at the airshow, and another long flight back. “It takes a year to 15 months” before travel fatigue sets in and freelancers begin to make excuses for not taking an assignment.”

Peaford's pet peeve is when press releases lack accompanying pictures. "It's so basic now; digital media relies on imagery, but that message still hasn't sunk through to a lot of PR agencies." He said an editor may have to search for up to 40 minutes to locate a suitable generic image with usage rights.

A "wow factor" photo is also the key to Page One / Day One coverage in the show dailies, "not a picture of a group of executives standing in a straight line."

The Journalist as Father

Alan and his wife, Jane, were instrumental in raising worldwide awareness of a rare genetic condition, Cornelia de Lange Syndrome – [CdLS](#) – which causes physical, cognitive and medical challenges but is not always diagnosed at birth. The Peafords' daughter, Victoria, is one of about 750 children in the UK with CdLS (about 5,000 globally). They were told she would not live past the age of 10. Victoria is now in her 30s.

"As a journalist, you sort of detach yourself from the emotion that this is something very, very close to one of your kids," Alan relates. "You look at it clinically. What is it? What really happens?"

They started a support group, initially a handful of families scattered around the UK. They got doctors in Europe and the US interested in learning more about CdLS, formed a Scientific Advisory Council, and Alan appeared on the *BBC*. As awareness spiked, the support group grew to include families in France, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, and around the world.



Order of the British Empire

Alan and others also lobbied politicians and others "to try to change the rules on how people with extreme learning difficulties are dealt with in school and society." For his efforts, Queen Elizabeth II honoured Alan as a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2014.

Peaford not only writes about aviation, he's a private pilot, often flying his Cessna 172 to the family's second home in southwest France. Jane prefers commercial, however, so Alan "races" her Ryanair flight. "A number of times when I land in Bergerac, I hear on the radio that Ryanair is coming in just behind me. That's brilliant."

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¹ Harold Evans' [Essential English for Journalists, Editors and Writers](#) is still considered a bible by many professionals.