

The Italian job

Event: Giornata Azzurra 2008

Venue: Pratica di Mare AB, Italy

Date: Sunday 25 May 2008

Reporter: Neil Pearson

Blessed with scorching temperatures, Giornata Azzurra 2008 attracted in excess of 200,000 spectators. With Italian air arms making increasingly fewer appearances at overseas events, this was an excellent opportunity to see their aircraft and it did not disappoint, with almost all types represented in both the static and flying displays.

Centrepiece of the six-hour flying programme was an impressive 40-minute tactical demo based on a scenario of taking control of an airfield on the border between two fighting countries. While Typhoons flew combat air patrols, a pair of Tornado IDS softened up enemy air defences to allow HH-3F Pelicans and an AB212 ICO to deploy Special Forces.

With the airfield secure, a C-27J Spartan and a C-130J Hercules brought personnel and equipment as a pair of AMXs undertook close air support.

Pratica di Mare is home to the Reparto Sperimentale Volo (RSV) test centre and there were solo displays from its Typhoon, AMX, MB339, Tornado and C-27J Spartan, the latter proving it is every bit as agile as its predecessor, the G222. Also going through their paces were an AV-8B Harrier II and EH101 from the Italian Navy, and a pair of A129 Mangustas and an NH90 from the Italian Army. Of course, the Freccie Tricolori closed the display to rapturous applause. Alenia Aermacchi sent the second M-346 prototype for a solo demo and to demonstrate AAR from a new KC-130J Hercules, alongside an MB339. Based at nearby Rome-Ciampino Airport, a Bombardier CL-415 from the Protezione Civile put on a very spirited display, rivalling the C-27J with

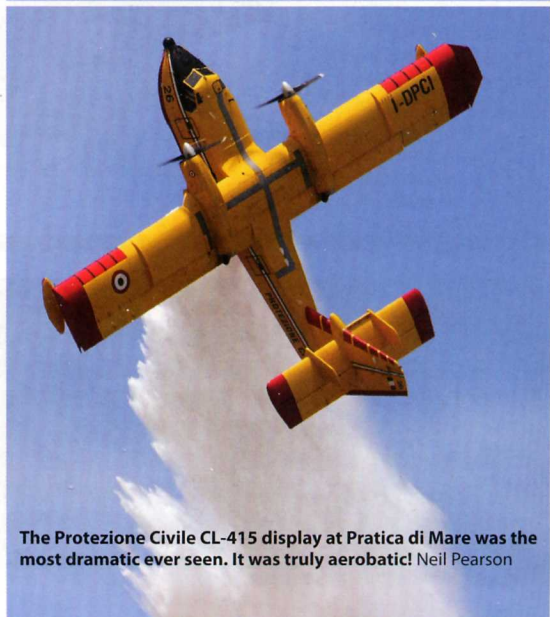
loops and barrel rolls and, naturally, giving a water drop. There was also an unusual formation appearance by four Typhoons — one Italian, one RAF and two Spanish.

It is to the show's credit that the foreign participation was by no means overshadowed by the 'home team'. This is not surprising, though, when one considers that the organisers managed to attract displays from a Hungarian Defence Forces Mi-24 and, for the first time for several years outside its home nation, a Romanian AF MiG-21 UM Lancer B (with a Lancer A in the static park). While all Italian types were represented in the static area, stealing the limelight was a pair of Mirage 2000-9EADs and their support C-130H Hercules from the United Arab Emirates AF.

The A verdict

Proof that Pratica really does make perfect!

A flare-firing AMX during the Italian AF set-piece at the Giornata Azzurra. Neil Pearson



The Protezione Civile CL-415 display at Pratica di Mare was the most dramatic ever seen. It was truly aerobatic! Neil Pearson