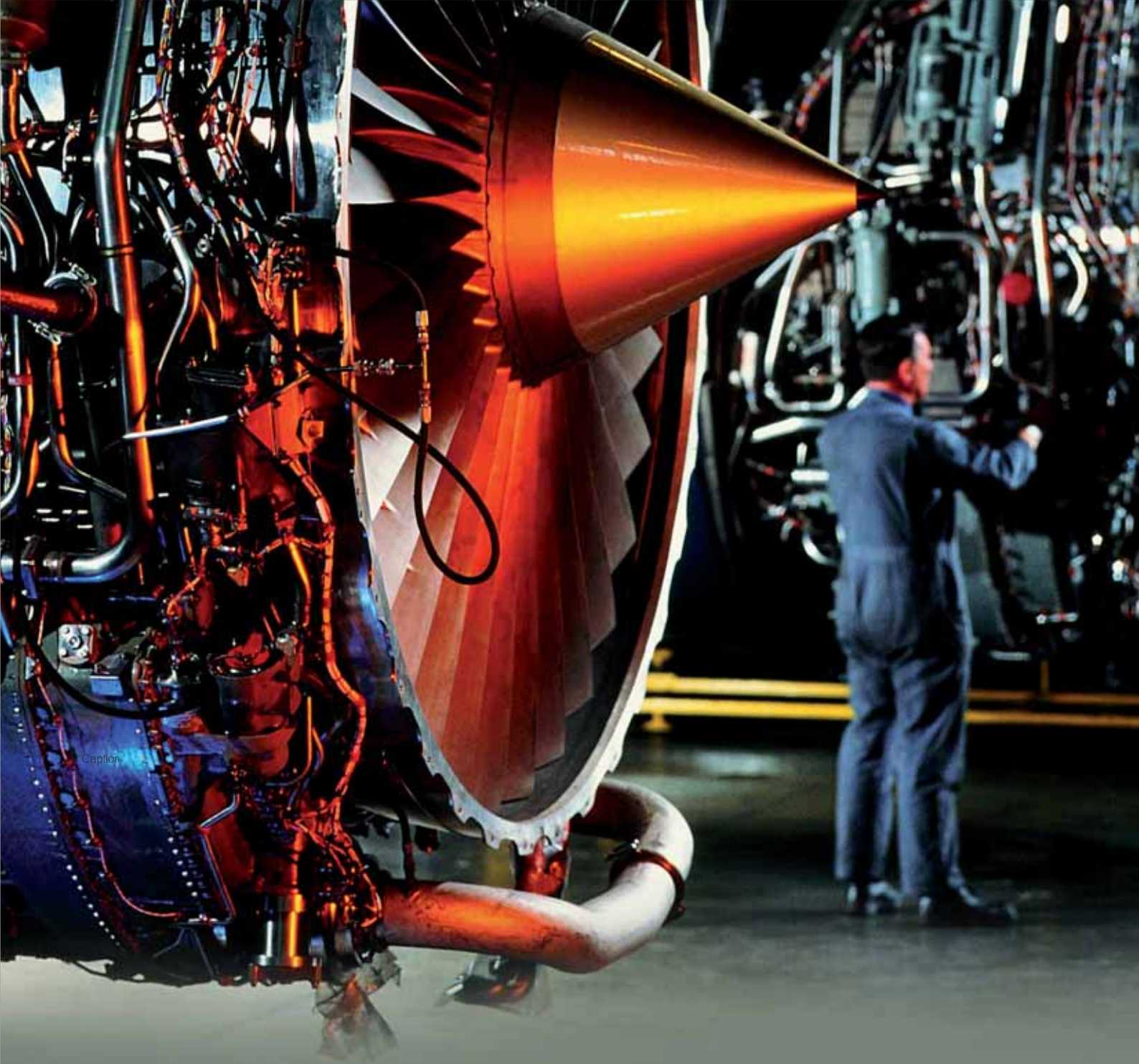


# [ A WING





Caption

# A wing

Glyn Mon Hughes

Some called it hype. When the A380 – the ‘Superjumbo’ – took to the skies for its maiden commercial flight from Singapore to Sydney, cameras were flashing, the press was out in force and people scrambled to buy flight tickets on ebay, such was the historic moment of the occasion.

For those who shrugged it off with a dismissive ‘so what?’, one group of workers watched events with pride – the workforce at the Airbus plant in Flintshire which manufactures wings for the entire family of aircraft.

Years in the making, ‘SuperJumbo’ is now commercial reality, dubbed “the flagship of the 21st century” by Airbus. So far, 198 aircraft have been ordered from major airlines such as British Airways, Air France, Lufthansa and Emirates, which plans to operate 58 planes.

Airbus is Wales’ largest private sector employer and employment at Broughton alone tops 6,500, with several thousand additional jobs supported through its supply chain. However, in challenging economic times, the size of the workforce is being pulled back and the number of aircraft being delivered in 2009 is to be 14 rather than the planned 18. But, according to Brian Fleet, director of the Broughton operation, A380 deliveries are expected to rise to 22 next year and 33 in 2011, in line with forecasts that world air travel will increase by 5% annually over the next 20 years making the highly efficient and eco-friendly aircraft a major asset.

“Airbus makes an invaluable contribution to the North Wales economy in terms of jobs, skills and technology,” said Ieuan Wyn Jones, Deputy First Minister and the Welsh Minister for the Economy and Transport.

So invaluable, that the Welsh Assembly Government injected £7.5m – its largest investment in research and development – into a £103m Airbus-led programme to revolutionise aircraft wing technology.

“Aerospace is vital to Wales,” said Paul Lindsay, Operations Director at the Aerospace Wales Forum. “It’s described by the WAG as one of the top three sectors, along with automotives and electronics.”

At present, aerospace employs 20,000 people around Wales, injecting £3bn-plus into the economy. There are 150 Welsh aerospace related businesses—household names like Airbus and BA, others parts of massive multinationals—BAe Systems, Thales UK or Raytheon, for example. But there remains a perception the sector is concentrated around Broughton and Cardiff.

“In principle, that’s true,” said Lindsay, “with manufacturing predominantly based around Airbus and MRO – maintenance, repair and overhaul – predominantly based around Cardiff, with three BA sites, GE Aviation and Nordam Europe, plus the remains of DARA at St Athan.

“There are, however, some big manufacturers in the South – Contour Premium Seating, Doncaster’s, CAV Aerospace and Gardner in the North. Hawker Beechcraft and Babcock at RAF Valley are also well into MRO on a large number of executive and military fast jets.”

Europe’s major MRO facility for commercial and military fixed wing and rotary aircraft is located at Aerospace Wales at St Athan and TES Aviation Group from Abercynon, specialising in technical, logistic and commercial support to both airlines and owners of aircraft engines, is well established at St Athan where the Ministry of Defence’s new in-service training centre will be based.

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