



Courtesy of Aust. National Aviation Museum

F-4E Phantom II

The 'Phabulous Phantom', produced by Boeing heritage company McDonnell Douglas, was a supersonic aircraft that could travel at double the speed of sound (Mach 2.2). The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) acquired 24 F-4E Phantom II fighter-bomber aircraft from the U.S. Government following delays with the delivery of the General Dynamics F-111C aircraft in 1970.

In July 1970, RAAF pilots and navigators from No. 1 and No. 6 Squadrons undertook conversion training at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida. U.S. Air Force (USAF) personnel were also posted to RAAF Base Amberley in Queensland to train Australian ground crew. By the end of November 1970, the RAAF had two squadrons of Phantoms operating at Amberley with minimal USAF support.

In September 1970, the RAAF accepted all 24 F-4Es and they proved to be highly effective, providing a significant improvement to the RAAF's ground attack capabilities.

The Phantoms were more technologically advanced than their predecessor the Canberra bomber, which was retired in 1971 after 15 years of service, as they could fly at supersonic speeds, were equipped with air-to-air radar and missiles, and had an inertial navigation system, ground-attack computer and a cannon.

TECHNICAL DATA: RAAF F-4E Phantom II

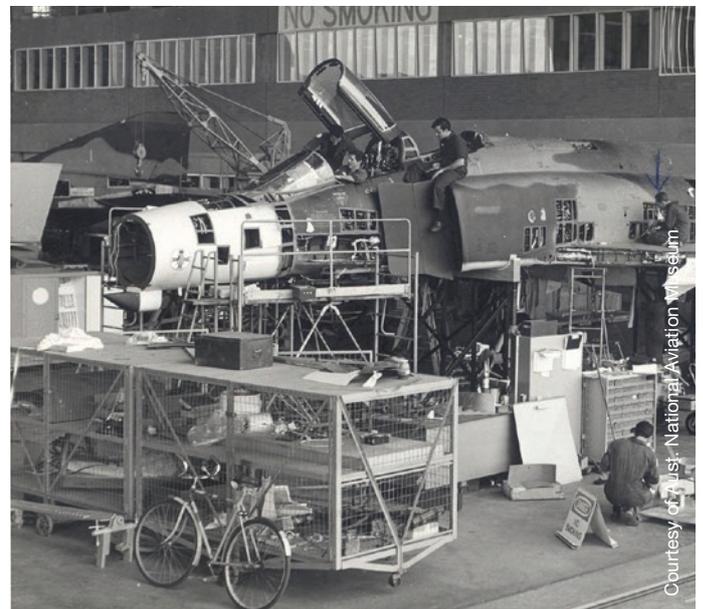
Power plant	Two 8120 kg (17 900 lb) thrust General Electric J79-GE-17A afterburning turbojet engines
Span	11.71m (38 ft 5 in)
Length	19.20m (63 ft)
Height	5.02m (16 ft 5.5 in)
Empty weight	13,757kg (30,328 lb)
Loaded weight	28,030kg (61,795 lb)
Maximum speed	2,390km/h (1290 kt)
Range	3,184km (1718 nm) with drop tanks
Service ceiling	62,250ft (18,975 m)
Armament	One General Electric M61 20 mm six-barrel cannon; Up to 7257 kg (16 000 lb) of stores including bombs, missiles and rockets

While the Phantoms were capable of operating in several roles, the RAAF primarily used them as strike aircraft. The Phantom's greatest advantage in air combat was acceleration and thrust, which permitted a skilled pilot to engage and disengage from the fight at will.

In addition to routine training flights, the Phantoms participated in major air defence exercises and flew practice sorties against warships. The F-4Es also took part in airshows, including four that formed part of the flying displays conducted in different parts of Australia to mark the RAAF's 50th anniversary during March and April 1971.

The RAAF was highly satisfied with the performance of the F-4Es, and they played an important role in preparing No. 82 Wing to operate the F-111. Many believed that it would have been very difficult for the wing to have transitioned directly from the Canberra to the much more complicated F-111. In particular, the Phantoms gave RAAF personnel experience operating aircraft fitted with sophisticated avionics and capable of using a wide range of weapons.

One of the Phantoms was destroyed in a flying accident in June 1971, and another was repaired by the RAAF after it sustained heavy damage during a crash landing. The 23 surviving aircraft were returned to the USAF in two batches during October 1972 and June 1973.



Courtesy of Aust. National Aviation Museum