

## UK Debuts Advanced Wedgetail Surveillance Jet at RIAT

July 20, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



Download IPFS

The United Kingdom's new Boeing E-7A Wedgetail airborne early warning and control aircraft has made its public debut at the Royal International Air Tattoo, marking a significant step forward in strengthening the Royal Air Force's long-range surveillance and defence capabilities.

The Boeing E-7A Wedgetail, based on a modified 737 Next Generation airframe, represents the future of airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) operations for the Royal Air Force (RAF). The first of three units ordered by the UK government was unveiled on 19 July during a high-profile flypast at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire. The aircraft appeared alongside the Red Arrows aerobatic display team before conducting a solo manoeuvre and performing a touch-and-go landing, highlighting its agility and mission-readiness.

Originally expected to appear earlier during the 18–20 July event, the aircraft was delayed due to a technical issue. Despite the minor setback, the successful demonstration was a key milestone in the platform's development. The aircraft, registered as WT001, has so far completed five test flights, with RAF and Boeing test pilots overseeing operations. These tests support evaluation work taking place at Birmingham Airport, managed by STS Aviation Services, the RAF's conversion partner.

Two additional Wedgetail aircraft are currently under production, both fitted with the Multi-role Electronically Scanned Array (MESA) radar developed by Northrop Grumman. The RAF is expected to declare initial operational capability for the E-7A platform in 2026. While the original plan included a fleet of five to replace the retired Boeing E-3D Sentry aircraft, procurement was scaled down to three. Nevertheless, the recently published Strategic Defence Review suggests the UK is exploring the option of acquiring more units, potentially through cost-sharing agreements with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies.

Speaking at the Global Air & Space Chiefs' Conference in London on 17 July, Armed Forces Minister Luke Pollard underscored the platform's value. "The E-7 Wedgetail will provide the improved performance we are looking for in the UK, offering greater speed, range, endurance, and crew capacity," Pollard stated. He emphasised its advanced capabilities to detect and respond to emerging threats, increasing survivability and resilience across joint-force operations.

Designed for long-term adaptability, the Wedgetail is equipped to evolve with changing defence needs over the next two decades. Its advanced radar and communication systems allow it to provide real-time situational awareness, which is critical for modern air operations. The aircraft's introduction reflects a focused investment in national security and defence modernisation, aligning with broader efforts to reinforce the UK's strategic edge.