

T O M R U B Y T H O N

"The trouble with predators is that they don't know who's the prey until he's dead. When BA come after you, which they inevitably will, shout long, shout hard and then sue the bastards."

Sir Freddie Laker

"Charming, courageous and modest, he was a larger-than-life figure with a wicked sense of humour and a great friend. I think we all have a lot to thank him for."

Sir Richard Branson



"He was a true pioneer because he was ahead of his time and he sort of inspired all of us to carry on and survive."

Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou

"His greatest strength was believing in Freddie Laker and his greatest weakness was probably believing in Freddie Laker."

Frank Robson

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ICARUS

The life of Freddie Laker

FOREWORD BY RICHARD BRANSON

ICARUS

The business adventure of Sir Freddie Laker

The Extraordinary Life of Sir Freddie Laker

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Freddie Laker became hooked on aeroplanes when, as a young boy, he looked up into the sky and saw the German Hindenberg airship cross over his home town of Canterbury. Coincidentally, a Handley Page bi-plane was flying the other way when something in his brain clicked. Suddenly, he knew that for the rest of his life he would be involved in this great new industry starting up in the skies. He got his first job at Short Brothers in Rochester helping build seaplanes until the factory was bombed by the Luftwaffe. During the rest of the war, he gained experience in all aspects of aviation. Afterwards, at the age of 24, he set up his first company, which traded in surplus aircraft from the war. Somehow, he managed to borrow £38,000 to buy a fleet of 12 Handley-Page Halton aircraft from BOAC. The Berlin airlift started almost immediately and all of his planes were commandeered by the British and American governments. It was during this period that his staff coined the phrase: "Work for Fred, burn your bed." Berlin made his first fortune: enough to set up his first airline operating flights on government contracts to Asia. He also set up a holiday company ferrying passengers and their cars across the English channel by air. In the late fifties, Laker sold out his hugely successful company to British United Airways and was appointed its managing director. Bored, he eventually left and founded Laker Airways in 1966, running charter flights to Europe for holiday operators. In 1971, he conceived the idea of cheap air travel in the form of a cut-price scheduled trans-atlantic service called Skytrain. Skytrain was granted a

licence in 1977 and revolutionised air travel. Laker Airways became Britain's second largest airline, operating 20 new jets and carrying millions of people across the Atlantic every year. But the early eighties' recession brought problems, and in February 1982, Laker Airways was forced to call in receivers amidst huge controversy. All the aircraft had to be sold off and creditors were eventually paid in full after Laker Airways settled a US\$1.5 billion anti-trust action in the United States. Ten years later, Laker re-entered the airline business in a much smaller way, flying three aircraft between Florida and the UK until Laker finally retired in 2005 at the age of 75.

Sir Freddie Laker was Britain's first great entrepreneur and the man who changed the lives of so many people by allowing Americans to fly to London and Britons to fly to New York at prices they could afford. He also unwittingly created the low-cost airline sector and saw his example followed to great effect by Herb Kelleher, Stelios Haji-Ionnau and Tony Ryan. Laker paved the way for governments and rival airlines to see that there was a place in the world for airlines that sold its seats like supermarkets sold groceries. He built Laker Airways into Britain's second largest airline, flying millions of passengers across the Atlantic every year. But in the process, he also made himself many enemies among the establishment. And one very dark day in February 1982, they all conspired to bring him and his airline down. This is that story how one man soared so high and then fell so low. It is the story of Britain's greatest-ever entrepreneur and his adventures in the airline business.

Icarus – The Life of Freddie Laker is published by The Myrtle Press

Icarus, the life of Freddie Laker is Tom Rubythron's return to the world of business writing after his twin biographies of Richard Burton and James Hunt. Rubythron spent some enjoyable times at home with Sir Freddie and his wife in 1993 when the seeds of a biography were first sown. But the idea for a biography was placed on the back burner for many years until the opportunity seemed right.



Rubythron is best known as the author of Life of Senna, the definitive biography of Brazilian race driver Ayrton Senna. Nearly eight years after its publication, it still sells over 8,000 copies a year. Rubythron followed up Life of Senna with Shunt: the story of James Hunt, which has so far sold nearly 22,000 copies in hardback. His latest biography is And God Created Burton. Before beginning as a biographer, Rubythron was well known in the world of magazine publishing, spanning the worlds of sport and business. Aside from his work in Formula One, he has been a specialist business writer for thirty years. In business, he is the former editor of BusinessAge, EuroBusiness and Spectator Business. In sport, he has edited F1 Magazine, BusinessF1 and SportsPro.

