

Sperry's New Symbolic Gyroscope

A 4.5 metre-high aluminium sculpture by Philip Bentham

Created in 1967 and cast by Morris Singer (the foundry responsible for the lions in Trafalgar Square)

Located at Sperry's Roundabout, at the junction of Wokingham Road and Downshire Way



What does Sperry's refer to?

Inventor Elmer A. Sperry founded the Sperry Gyroscope Company in the USA in 1910. From the 1950s, the British arm -- called Sperry Gyroscope Limited -- had its headquarters in Bracknell, next to what continues to be known as Sperry's Roundabout. In 1982, British Aerospace bought the company for £42 million: in 1989, it closed down the Bracknell facility in a cost-cutting exercise.

What is a gyroscope?

A gyroscope is essentially a spinning disk mounted within a mechanism that allows it free movement. The forces exerted by the rapid rotation mean that it behaves contrary to expectations: however much it's disturbed, its axis will always maintain a constant direction, and it can counter some of the effects of gravity. Gyroscopic effects are seen in the behaviour of tops, boomerangs and yo-yos.

The main uses of gyroscopes are in compasses (especially on ships, aircraft, submarines and guided missiles) and to help stabilise ships, motorcycles, telescopes etc.

What was happening at Sperry's in 1967?

In the mid 1960s, Sperry's built an extension to its factory in Bracknell and transferred the work of its Brentwood branch to the site. In doing this, Sperry's became Bracknell's biggest employer.

The sculpture *Sperry's New Symbolic Gyroscope* marks this time of rapid expansion and optimism.

So why doesn't it look exactly like a gyroscope?

In use, gyroscopes are embedded within equipment, out of sight. Bentham's sculpture resembles the type of gyroscope that's made as a toy, or used in physics lessons. So it's already one step away from the gyroscopes that were manufactured at Sperry's.

The artist has also introduced some exaggerated, sweeping curves and lines. These are celebratory flourishes, perhaps.

By leaving out one side of the circular frame that usually surrounds a gyroscope's spinning disk, the artist cleverly suggests the type of model globe that is found in classrooms and in people's living rooms.

The object held aloft by the two 'arms' of the sculpture also resembles a spinning top (an object in which gyroscopic forces are at work).

So the free interpretations by the artist all serve to convey something about the behaviour and uses of gyroscopes, and the global impact of Sperry's.

What does the title suggest?

The upbeat title *Sperry's New Symbolic Gyroscope* suggests that the artist wanted to create an inspiring symbol for the many uses, as well as the immense impact, of the gyroscopes made by the workforce at Sperry's.

Do you have any information about this sculpture or the artist?

Please get in touch – in trying to find out about the artist in particular, we have drawn a blank.

A gyroscope toy, a model of the globe and a spinning top:

