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## Outdoing the Thrillers

SOME reflection on supersonic flying is appropriate on two accounts: the first—and the more sensational—an unconfirmed report that flight at a Mach number of 3 has been achieved by the Bell X-1; the second (more valuable in being carefully substantiated and detailed) an article by Stanley Evans in this issue, dealing with supersonic achievements of the Douglas Skyrocket.

Let it be remarked at the outset that the American Air Force and Navy, sponsors of the X-1 and Skyrocket respectively, have handled publicity for their supersonic achievements in an exasperatingly circumspect manner. Those "wild American claims" which are somehow instinctively believed by many people in this country to have been advanced (though this, on investigation, does not prove to be the case) have certainly not stemmed from official sources. So little authentic information has, in fact, seeped out of America that Mr. Evans' *Tonic Sonics* will come as a highly stimulating draught to many interested readers.

If, as an American aviation editor asserts, the Bell X-1 has achieved Mach 3, representing a speed of some 2,000 m.p.h., then the latest scientific thriller (see Gerald Kersh's *The Suppressed Part of the Sant Report* in the *Daily Mail* of December 30th) becomes as dated as the earlier romances of Wells. But whatever the truth behind the American editor's story, we may well speculate on how we might have reacted even two short years ago to the unequivocal report, now coldly and carefully set down in this very issue of *Flight*, that "supersonic flights have become more or less normal practice, even down to desert level."

That we in Britain have missed our first cue in the exciting drama of supersonic research is obvious to the world; but behind the scenes, we believe, resolute action is being taken to ensure that in the vital phase of developing aircraft for practical supersonic operation we shall not be found wanting in courage or resourcefulness.

## Records

WHATEVER may be one's personal opinion on the value of records, there is ample evidence to indicate that the world public is impressed by fastest, highest, farthest and other superlative achievements, whether by animal or machine. Flying as a whole can seldom profit by such demonstrations if they are of the spectacular sort, but nearly always gains when they are of the workaday, routine service variety. Many aircraft records, both "ultimate" and class, are witness to both human and mechanical efficiency, and are of real technical value. Fighters need speed and climb, airliners carrying capacity.

With each year that passes, the achievement of greater speed and higher altitude calls for more-specialized aircraft and increasingly taxes the ingenuity of the technician as much as the skill and courage of the pilot. Thus, to make such attempts becomes ever-more costly in cash and in the diversion of skilled men from more urgent work. This, more than anything else, accounts for the meagre showing which Britain makes in the list of world's records published in the following pages.

In the past, Service aircraft have been able to capture records almost as a routine job: for example, American bombers hold many for distance and speed with load. Probably for the last time, a standard jet fighter (the F-86) holds the world's speed record; there is certainly more than one research aircraft now capable of eclipsing its performance. It is a little disturbing that no British military aircraft in service to-day is capable of taking an ultimate or class record, although some prototypes—the S.R./A.1 and, no doubt, the Canberra, for example—are potential record-holders. It is significant that the Venom is very closely related to the Ghost-Vampire, Britain's successful contender for the altitude title. Surprisingly enough, no category exists for rate of climb; in this quality several British fighters excel.

Until this country is in a position further to enhance the prestige of her aircraft industry by regaining world records, there will be publicity value in continuing to demonstrate useful performance by high-speed capital-to-capital flights.