



Autocar and Dragonfly at the Aurukun Mission, where they had arrived with witnesses for a murder trial.



Autocar on the beach at Port...

BUSH PILOT'

IN his recent Commonwealth and Empire lecture, the Duke of Edinburgh laid particular emphasis on the "outback" services in the Northern Territory of Australia. Pilots engaged on these services, said the Duke, were doing by air, with added difficulties, what the carriers and bus drivers were doing in the rural areas of Britain. A clear impression of the nature of this outback flying is given below by an Australian bush pilot of great experience. During the past 15 years Mr. Roche has operated from every state in Australia. He and his wife—an ex-A.T.A. pilot with over 1,000 hours to her credit—are members of Bush Pilots Airways Pty., Ltd., which is equipped with a D.H. Dragon and Dragonfly (one of the few still flying), a Cessna and an Auster. Mr. Roche is also chief pilot to the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade.

TO pilots used to flying in Great Britain and Europe, where there are abundant airports, radio aids, roads, railways and cities, outback flying in Australia must seem like something from the horse and buggy days. Actually, although a little primitive at times, it is nevertheless an absorbing and fascinating job.

For some years past I have been flying in far northern Queensland, over an area of, roughly, two hundred thousand square miles—which, if my memory serves me correctly, is bigger than the

area of Great Britain. In all this vast area, with the exception of several small cities on the coast, there are not more than a dozen tiny ghost-towns, relics of the roaring gold mining days. Most of the flying is from homestead to homestead.

The country is tough and rugged and varies enormously in character. On the coast there are long golden beaches, towering mountain ranges, dense tropical jungles, and miles of snow-white sand dunes. Farther inland are areas of rocky basalt country, almost bare of vegetation; the grassy plains adjoining the great rivers; and the dead eroded hills and barren deserts of the Mount Isa area. From the Gulf of Carpentaria, right up the Peninsula, the country is heavily timbered, swampy and crocodile-infested.

All the aircraft flying over this area are based at Cairns, the northernmost city in Queensland. Beautifully situated on Trinity Inlet, this city of over 18,000 inhabitants is ringed on three sides by heavily wooded mountains whose peaks rise to over 4,000ft. This chain, which rises abruptly from the sugar-cane fields, about two to three miles behind the city, stretches inland in places for a distance of over sixty miles. After take-off from Cairns one nearly always has to circle for sufficient height to clear this range; and in the summer-time, when the density altitude is high, I have on



This 1937 Cessna four-seater, originally owned by the author, now operates as an ambulance from Hughendon, about 100 miles west of Townsville.

(Right) Cairns Airport, the centre of the flying ambulance service described by the author. A 1,000ft slope overshadows the main runway.

