



Pan American's 71-seat DC-7Bs are at present the most modern transports in service on the North Atlantic route.

BLUE RIBAND ROUTE

Atlantic Air Traffic Today and Tomorrow

By ROBERT J. BLACKBURN

EVERY twelve minutes, on average, a long-range airliner begins or ends a scheduled flight along the Atlantic airways linking Europe and North America. Every day the 15 airlines competing for traffic on this great international route are offering nearly 3,500 seats on some 60 first-class, tourist, or mixed-class services.

This permanent airlift, by reason of its regularity, and because it has developed so gradually over the post-war years, has never been a source of public wonder or acclaim. It nevertheless represents a major stage in the evolution of transport. The history of the North Atlantic airways is in large measure the history of long-distance air travel.

The momentous PanAm announcement of a £96 million order for jet transports makes it timely to review briefly the growth of North Atlantic air traffic to date, and to hint at the shape of things to come. Undoubtedly a revolution is in progress. Over the past year ten major transatlantic airlines have placed orders for 172 new transport aircraft destined primarily for North Atlantic service and having a total basic value, excluding spare parts, of well over £200 million.

Though this sum represents perhaps 20 per cent of the capital value of all the transport aircraft in scheduled airline service today, North Atlantic air traffic accounted for only about seven per cent of scheduled airline ton-miles performed in 1954. These figures stress the abnormally competitive nature of the route, a fact further emphasized by the multiplicity of carriers involved.

Regular, large-scale airline traffic between Europe and North America began in earnest nine years ago with the introduction of the first services by pressurized landplanes—Constellations, DC-6s and, later, Stratocruisers. These types, or their deriva-

tives, are still carrying the vast majority of traffic and will continue to do so until the first of the new generation of turbine-powered transports appear at the end of this decade. The growth of air and sea traffic respectively over the past seven years is plotted in the following table, showing annual totals of passengers carried.

North Atlantic Passenger Traffic							
	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954
Air	253,000	273,000	317,000	341,000	446,000	510,000	578,000
Sea	637,000	672,000	762,000	710,000	844,000	900,000	938,000

Probably the most significant trend shown by these figures is the overall traffic-increase of 70 per cent during this seven-year period. Between 1948 and 1954 the airlines increased their passenger carryings by 129 per cent, whereas ship traffic increased by some 47 per cent. However, it is important to note that ships are still carrying the greater share of the traffic (62 per cent last year), even though their share has decreased by 9 per cent since 1948.

The concern felt by shipping companies about the effects of increasing air competition is understandable and—from a long-term viewpoint, perhaps—justified. But some shipping spokesmen, in expressing such fears, tend to overlook the fact that their own traffic has increased by an average of nearly seven per cent in each of the past seven years, which appears a reasonable rate of growth for an established form of transport. Moreover, it is unlikely that the airlines alone have reaped all the benefits of the increased community of interest—and potential traffic—created by the establishment of regular over-night travel between the two continents.

Again, it may be noted that a high proportion of transatlantic air traffic represents a new market which the shipping companies, because of the low speed of their services, are incapable of tapping. The businessman making several quick transatlantic journeys per year is one obvious example of this new class of traffic. Another is the wage-earner who can afford the transatlantic fare but whose vacation period is limited to two or three weeks.

It seems reasonably certain that American tourists do in fact represent the largest single class of transatlantic air travellers today. It was not always so. In the immediate post-war years the fares of most passengers were paid by their employers, whether Governments or private companies. In 1948 traffic was stimulated by the large number of Europeans emigrating by air to North America, though the flow was one-way and resulted in a 20 per cent unbalance between westbound and eastbound traffic. A further stimulus to traffic was the devaluation of the pound, late in 1949, which brought the possibility of a 1950 summer holiday in Europe within the grasp of many thousands of North Americans.

By far the most important factor influencing the development of traffic on the North Atlantic route—and, indeed, on every other international route—was the introduction of the so-called "tourist" fare on May 1st, 1952. Passengers were for the first time offered a choice of second-class travel at an average rate of 30 per cent

All B.O.A.C.'s North Atlantic services are operated by Stratocruisers, still regarded by many travellers as the most comfortable on the route. The big Boeings also operate PanAm's first-class services.

