



Straight and Level



IT has become the practice of many people, both within and outside the business of making or operating aeroplanes, to criticize the "procurement" policy of airlines or governments. (It has to be "procurement"; the word "buying" is much too simple and unimpressive to be attractive.) Now I adhere to the age-old dictum that people should practise what they preach; and, furthermore, that professional preachers should be very careful indeed about what they themselves practise. I would not feel competent to criticize someone for buying the wrong aeroplane if I had just discovered that I had personally chosen to have the wrong type of car. And more than once I have stood at a bar with the feeling "this beer is wrong procurement—both money and time could be better spent—I just enjoy it."

Even those who write critical documents should guard against their own incorrect procurement of words. I have in my hand a highly colourful tirade against the procurement policy of "Whitehall," written in such terms that it is abundantly clear that the author is ignorant of the precise meaning of several of his words. Please don't think I am trying to stifle criticism; but I do believe that critics should put their own house in order first.

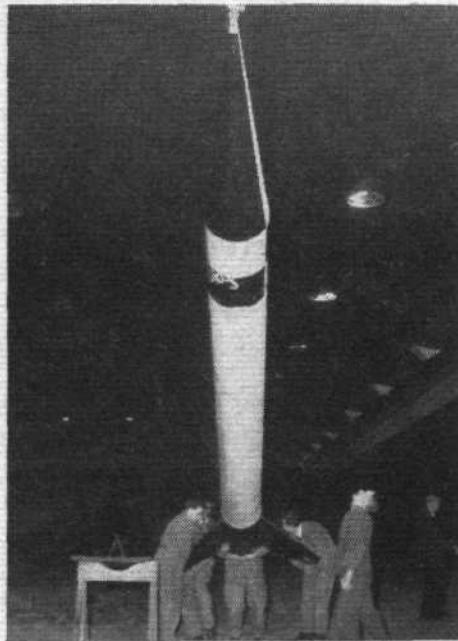
● One of the biggest military bases in the world is Camp Cooke, California, where the U.S. Air Force conduct most of their ICBM training. I am delighted to read that Convar are assigning a staff of their own at Camp Cooke "to establish criteria for Atlas ICBM complexes, integrate installation of ground-support equipment and checkout the complexes upon completion . . ." If only I understood what it meant.

● The other week this column agreed with the sentiment that "it's tough at the top" in industry. One of the most well-founded and prosperous firms in the aeronautical world is Douglas Aircraft; but they must have a hard job keeping their income ahead of their expenditure. I believe that their daily bill for raw material exceeds \$1,000,000; and I have just read that they have established a publications centre at Lawndale (south of L.A. international airport) for the 950 tech-pubs people. Yes, I said 950. Man, what overheads!

● I believe it was Einstein who first demonstrated that mass could be completely destroyed and turned into energy. Without indulging in such subatomic sleight-of-hand, I wonder how many of my readers can solve this one. If one were to weigh a Boeing B-52D at, for example, Castle A.F.B., California, one might well find the weight to be 400,000 lb avoirdupois. If the aircraft then took off and headed for New York

and, *en route*, refuelled to replace all the fuel consumed since starting the engines, the weight would only be brought back to about 396,500 lb. But should the pilot decide to abandon his mission and head back to Castle, the weight would rise to some 403,500 lb. Next week I shall try to explain why.

● What do you think the chances are of a Minister of the Crown getting up and saying, "I particularly want to set the minds of some of you at rest on one point: the fate of this aircraft has in no sense been decided by its technical merit. The decision has been taken on purely political grounds."



● The old country is in a pretty bad way again. So one could conclude from the above picture. Obviously one of two things is happening. Either we are so short of cabers (for tossing) that Highland flingers have to practise with any odd Skylark rocket that happens to be around; or we are so short of conventional rocket-launching equipment that we have to employ caber-tossers to do the job. We've all heard of economy cuts, but this is ridiculous.

In actual fact this Skylark is appearing at the Factory Equipment Exhibition at Earls Court. And what have research rockets to do with factory equipment? That's a very good question. You work it out.

● Senator Flanders, the well-known Republican from Vermont, said in a recent television programme that it was "as necessary for the United States to occupy outer space and rule space as it was for England to rule the seas in her conflict with Spain." Well, I've read enough science fiction and seen enough horrific space films to be able to talk the language, but never before have I heard

a serious suggestion that anybody should "occupy" outer space. It could be that quite a lot of people would agree with the suggestion that the first drafts of personnel to outer space (wherever that may be) should be the world's politicians.

● Of course, if one can build a big supersonic tunnel next to a waterfall, one can save quite a lot of money—either by using hydro-electric power or by driving the compressor (or fan, whichever you like to call it) by a Pelton wheel, as the French have done. I see that a survey of the Commonwealth was made some time ago to find a site where this could be done. The answer that came up was Tasmania. Just how far away can you get?

● Actions, my Scoutmaster used to say, speak louder than words. Among those who believe in both is one Michael Gee, Finchley accountant and glider pilot. Not long ago at the Kronfeld Club, Mr. Gee spoke, with eloquence and David Carrow, against the motion "That this house wants gliding in comfort and joy." The motion was carried. His words having failed to stem majority approval of the modern decadence of comfortable gliding, Mr. Gee gives a practical demonstration of the fact that a little discomfort is all part of the game. How? By landing the Cambridge Club's Olympia in the sea just off Llandudno, after a bungee launch from the Great Orme. He was soaked to the skin.

● As a matter of fact, this particular glider was dunked once before, by Jim Grantham in the North Sea off Clacton in 1950. What was it that chap Masefield wrote? . . . "I must go down to the sea again, To the lonely sea and the sky . . ." And while we're talking about the joys of gliding, how about the Swiss sailplane pilot who, at 7,000ft over Locarno last week, was attacked by a 10ft-span royal eagle? According to the *Times* correspondent, "the pilot escaped this violent attack only by nose-diving, and the bird was finally *put to flight* [my italics] by a Swiss Air Force fighter pilot."

Anyone for croquet?

● Did you ever take a close look at some madeira cake? I've just had some that is almost indistinguishable, except for taste, from some of these foamed-in-place fillers.

● I rather liked the remark of Mr. J. W. S. Brancker, traffic director of I.A.T.A.: "Only the rich can afford to travel slowly." But when I read this out to a colleague he commented: "Is there a grain of truth in that?"

Well, is there?

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