



ICELANDAIR

Iceland's Older Airline Celebrates its 21st Birthday

TO be the most air-minded country in the world is a claim often made by Iceland—and it is no idle one; the equivalent of more than half its population of only 160,000 was carried in 1957 by the older of its two national airlines, Flugfélag Islands h.f. (Iceland Airways, Ltd.). Now more commonly known as Icelandair, the company carried a total of 80,504 passengers in 1957 (an increase of 14.44 per cent over 1956), and 59,501 of them flew on the domestic routes which it has operated alone since February 1952. A sparse road-network and a complete lack of railways combine to make air transport a "must" for the people of Iceland, and to meet this need Icelandair was formed twenty-one years ago.

The company was founded on June 3, 1937, as Flugfélag Akureyrar, with headquarters at Akureyri, the major town and fishing port on Iceland's north coast; initially the company's capital was held by a group of Akureyri citizens. In the following April the company acquired its first aircraft, a four-passenger Waco YKS biplane seaplane which was used for charter work to various points around the coast. During the winter of 1939-40 the Waco capsized on taking off from Skerjaffjord and was badly damaged. As a result the company was reorganized in 1940 as Flugfélag Islands h.f., headquarters were moved to Reykjavik, and the capital was increased to Kr.150,000. At present, capital is owned jointly by the Icelandic Steamship Co. (which is the major shareholder), the Government and Icelandic citizens. A second Waco YKS was bought after the move to Reykjavik, and the original Waco was eventually repaired. In the summer of 1940 Flugfélag Islands received a government contract to spot herring shoals for the fishing boats working out of Akureyri. Herring spotting had been done from the air since 1937, being financed by the fishermen on a co-operative basis.

During the war Iceland became a base for British (and later American) forces, for the use of which the country's first aerodromes—in particular Keflavik (Meeks Field) and Reykjavik—were constructed. In 1942 Flugfélag acquired two D.H. Rapides; later on a Beechcraft 18D and a Catalina joined the fleet. The advantages of being able to operate from land as well as water were reflected in a steep rise in traffic. Even in 1938 as many as 770 passengers were carried by the single Waco seaplane, plus a small quantity of freight. This total had increased almost tenfold by 1945, in which year 7,143 passengers were carried. Not many weeks after VE-day Flugfélag's Catalina made the company's first international flights, doing several trips to the U.K. and Denmark. Regular, scheduled services between Reykjavik, Prestwick and Copenhagen began on May 27, 1946, initially using 14-passenger Liberators to Prestwick and 21-passenger Dakotas to Copenhagen; after the first two months 24-passenger Liberators were used all the way. These aircraft were chartered from and flown by Scottish Airlines, Ltd.

On April 10, 1948, Flugfélag's first Skymaster, TF-ISE *Gullfaxi* ("Golden Horse"), was put on to the routes from Reykjavik to Prestwick, Copenhagen and Oslo, and Scottish Airlines ceased to operate these services. The fleet by then consisted of one DC-4, three PBV-5A Cansos, three DC-3s, a Rapide, a Grumman JRF-5 Goose and a Norseman. *Gullfaxi* opened the first direct Iceland-London service on May 3, 1949, flying once a week between Reykjavik and Northolt with a stop at Prestwick; for a time the services to London alternated fortnightly with those of Loftleidir h.f. The year 1955 saw the addition of Frankfurt, Hamburg,

Icelandair's three DC-3s carry the majority of the airline's internal traffic. Here two of them cross Iceland's indented coastline.

Bergen and Stockholm to the route network and the purchase of a second DC-4, TF-IST *Solfaxi* ("Sun Horse"), from Fred Olsen Flyselskap A/S. The first DC-4 was later sold to Africair.

In March 1957 two V.759 Viscounts—which can be fitted with slipper tanks—were acquired from Hunting-Clan, and arrived in Iceland on May 2 last year; they are registered TF-ISN *Gullfaxi* and TF-ISU *Hrimfaxi*. The DC-4 now operates some of the internal routes when traffic is heavy, and the Viscounts have taken over European services. There are five Viscount services a week between Reykjavik, Glasgow and Copenhagen, leaving at 0800 hr and arriving at Copenhagen at 1500. Icelandair has traffic rights between Glasgow and the Danish capital, providing the only direct day service between these two cities. There is a twice-weekly Reykjavik - Oslo - Copenhagen - Hamburg service, the Viscount leaving at 0800 Thursdays and 1000 Saturdays; as from June 29 there will be a third service, leaving at 0800 Mondays.

Loftleidir's DC-4s fly exactly the same route, leaving Iceland's capital at 0945 on Thursdays and returning on Sundays, and Loftleidir operates a similar Reykjavik - Gothenburg - Copenhagen - Hamburg service twice weekly. Icelandair flies the direct Reykjavik - London route on Mondays and Thursdays; the Viscount leaves Iceland at 1000 and arrives at London Airport Central at 1500. Loftleidir's DC-4s fly out on this route on Mondays and back on Tuesdays, stopping at Renfrew.

Icelandair has traffic rights between Oslo, Copenhagen and Hamburg, and its Viscounts compete with S.A.S. Metropolitan and DC-6s between Oslo, Gothenburg and Copenhagen, while between Copenhagen and Hamburg Lufthansa and S.A.S. Seven Seas, DC-6Bs and Metropolitan share traffic with the Viscounts of Icelandair and Eagle Airways. The latter run a Manchester - Hamburg - Copenhagen service on Mondays and Fridays.

Icelandair's Viscounts raised average load-factors from 58.4 per cent to 75.5 per cent and increased the number of passengers carried by 46 per cent in the first four months of their operations. Last July they carried five times as many passengers between Copenhagen and Hamburg as the DC-4s had carried in July 1956, even though frequencies between these points had been increased by some 70 per cent. The increase in passengers carried on European routes during the whole of 1957 was 35.2 per cent over the 1956 total, and Icelandair considers that its Viscounts have given it a great competitive advantage.

Much of Icelandair's traffic is carried on the internal services which connect Reykjavik with 20 towns and villages. A fleet of three DC-3s and two PBV-5A Canso amphibians, as well as the Grumman Goose, fly these services and also undertake ambulance flights, charter work and herring-shoal spotting. As might be expected, passengers on these internal routes come from all walks of life. Fishermen from the north fly south for the cod-fishing season, and north again when the herring season begins (up to three services a day run to Akureyri). Schoolchildren often fly from Reykjavik to various parts of the country to enjoy their holidays working on farms. But perhaps the aeroplane is valued most highly by Iceland's farmers, not only for flying from the farming districts to Reykjavik on business or pleasure, but as a means of getting their produce to market. Such items as tractors, foodstuffs, fuel and building materials are delivered by air for use on the farm, and live sheep have been flown from remote farming districts for resettlement in other parts of the country, this method proving cheaper than surface transport. Icelandair DC-3s have several times dropped foodstuffs and other material to farms cut off by heavy snowfalls. A total of 1,275,000 kg of freight was carried on internal routes last year, an 8.8 per cent increase over 1956.

Icelandair also pays many visits to Greenland, and nearly 400 trips have been made there since 1952 carrying passengers, freight and mail to such places as Thule and Narsarsuak or Blue West One. Food and supplies have also been dropped by parachute to scientists stationed on the Greenland Ice-cap.

The importance of internal air transport to the community is underlined by the fact that Icelandair has two traffic managers, one for international and one for domestic routes, although the airline's staff totals only about 250 people. But the achievements in the past 21 years certainly justify their neat summing up of Icelandair as "The biggest little airline in the world." M. J. H.



Introduction of Viscounts in 1957 substantially raised the airline's average load factors in the first four months of service.