

Correspondence

The Editor of "Flight" is not necessarily in agreement with the views expressed by correspondents in these columns. Names and addresses of writers, not for publication in detail, must in all cases accompany letters.

Less Crying, More Flying?

THERE are many who bewail the trouble and difficulties surrounding private flying; this little history is, however, a true record of the facts as they happened to me in 1959.

In August, I bought a Percival Prentice from Aviation Traders Ltd; they turned it out like a new car and I felt that I had bought the business when I finally took delivery and flew it away! Five months and 69 hours later (over 13hr a month) I find I have spent under £10 on repairs and maintenance, never had a delay due to mechanical trouble and never missed a heartbeat despite trips to Amsterdam, Paris and several to Le Touquet.

I have used the Prentice like a car, often going to work in Bristol (30 miles away) from a field at the back of my home. I cross London on an average twice a week to visit Southend, and once 126-7 is selected, I am given more help and information than I deserve.

I find there are airports I can use—civil, common-user and also odd private fields (like Lec at Bognor Regis)—in profusion and I have yet to have "no" for an answer when I phone out-of-the-way places and explain why I want to use a particular field. At weekends I take my family of three boys, wife and a dog to odd coastal resorts comfortably, in clean air, passing over traffic pile-ups near the coasts at a steady 110kt. I can be swimming at Bembridge, IoW, an hour after leaving my home 60 miles away.

In a nutshell, private flying is far from a difficult, red-tape-bursting effort; a good, solid all-metal five-seater can be bought off the shelf for the price of a good car, and bearing in mind traffic delays, it is no dearer to run if you carry the odd passenger and make a sensible allowance for the time you undoubtedly save.

"Less crying and more flying" is the answer!

Trowbridge, Wilts

T. D. KEEGAN

The FAA and Decca

THE recent press release of the Federal Aviation Agency which says that the Decca Mk 10 navigational system has a number of serious shortcomings is one which should be rigorously challenged by the UK authorities. The FAA statement uses the words, "The FAA findings confirmed the ICAO stand that VOR, complemented by DME, offers flexibility and economy as a world-wide standard short-range navigational system."

This "weaselly worded" document makes some sweeping criticisms which may be justified, but then goes on to argue that because A is good (VOR) then it must follow that B (Decca) is bad. Such arguments should be confined to things which have a significant number of functions or attributes common to both.

I would suggest that the FAA is deliberately confusing the issues which are involved and in ignoring the fact that there might be room for both systems. The FAA has chosen also to ignore the fact that the Decca system is the only navigational aid which presents the pilot with an easily interpreted pictorial presentation of position. We must remember the FAA comments five years hence when we are all forced, by USA pressure, to fit the all-singing, all-talking, 3D system ThisiswhereUR—whether or not it works all of the time for all of the people.

London NW2

L. F. E. COOMBS

Veteran DC-3s

OF the still impressive total of some 1,670 Douglas DC-3s still in world-wide scheduled airline service it would not be unreasonable to estimate that about four dozen have logged between 40,000 and 45,000 airframe hours. Likewise it could



70,398 airframe hours in 20 years: North Central's DC-3 N.21728, "Winnebago," referred to in the letter from Dennis M. Powell

be fairly assumed that of these at least a dozen have reached the 50,000hr-plus mark.

After some rather enjoyable research, it is my opinion that two particular transports of this type could claim a world's absolute record so far as flying hours are concerned: and this includes any type of aeroplane still in commercial service anywhere in the world today. Their current owners, North Central Airlines Inc, of Minneapolis, have told me that they certainly have no intention of retiring these two machines for at least another two years. Here are the details:—

	Reg. N.21728	Reg. N.21729
Constructor's number	2144	2141
Original owner	Eastern A.L.	ditto
Year built	Aug 1939	June 1939
Date delivered	Aug 19, 1939	June 14, 1939
Sold by Eastern (to NCA)	July 11, 1952	March 7, 1953
Airframe hours with Eastern	51,389	52,559
Total hours to Nov 1, 1959	70,398	69,140
Estimated mileage	11,263,680	11,062,400
Passenger seats	28	28
Gross t.o.w. (lb)	25,346	25,346
Max l.w. (lb)	ditto	ditto
Normal payload (lb)	6,746	6,746
Average stage speed (m.p.h.)	150	150

Some facts about the airline itself may be of interest. Average daily utilization for 27 DC-3s in 1958 was 7.63hr. Five more DC-3s were subsequently acquired, so the current fleet of these veteran transports is 32. The company operated five Convair 340s for about a year (they acquired them in 1957-58), but they did not prove successful to the short-stage route-pattern and were therefore sold when the extra five DC-3s were obtained.

Not only do North Central possess the biggest "Whistle-stop" fleet in America, but they carry more airmail and cargo than any of the other "local airlines," a record they have held since 1954. During the first ten years of operation (to February 1958) they carried two million passengers and flew 320 million passenger-miles over an unduplicated route-mileage of 3,650 serving 52 towns in nine states. Staff increases sharply reflect NCA's steady growth. When they began scheduled operations in 1948 their total equipment consisted of three Lockheed 10As with a total of about 90 employees. Today their payroll numbers over 1,250, of which 192 are pilots.

Unquestionably, the man chiefly responsible for this success-story is a youthful Texan named Hal N. Carr—at 37 the youngest airline president in America. With his 15 years of top-level management experience in the US airline industry, he soon reversed the company's position from one of the lowest to the top in profits, and from the top to the bottom in operating costs.

Despite the sometimes harsh criticism bestowed upon the ageless DC-3 by thousands of regular air travellers—both in the USA and elsewhere—all this shows how a domestic airline can be successfully run with obsolescent equipment (so called in fashionable circles). I recall a delightful little cartoon in *Flight* a couple of years ago. Drawn by "Ram," it depicted a production-line of DC-3s with two gentlemen overlooking the scene. The simple caption was: "It's a DC-3 replacement."

Nairobi, Kenya

DENNIS M. POWELL

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- Jan. 23. Aircraft Recognition Society: Annual All-England Competition.
- Jan. 25-28. Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences: 28th Annual Meeting and Honours Night Dinner, New York.
- Jan. 27. Kronfeld Club: Film Evening.
- Jan. 29. RAEs Man-powered Aircraft Group: "Engineering Aspects in Man-powered Flight," by B. S. Shenstone.
- Feb. 2. British Interplanetary Society: "The Use of Reinforced Plastics in Rockets," by A. Wilson.
- Feb. 2. RAEs: "Suppression of Shock-induced Separations by Boundary Layer Control," by H. H. Pearcey.
- Feb. 5. RAEs Rotorcraft Section: "Helicopter Operations of New York Airways," by R. L. Cummings.
- Feb. 6. "Conquest of Space," by Mrs A. Masevich, Royal Festival Hall, London (and at Birmingham on 8th, Bristol on 9th and Manchester on 12th).
- Feb. 8. Institute of Transport: Brancker Memorial Lecture, "RAF Transport Command," by Air Chief Marshal Sir Denis Barnett.

- Feb. 9. RAEs: "Model Testing in the Aircraft Research Association Co-operative Wind Tunnels," by E. C. Carter.
- Feb. 10. British Institution of Radio Engineers (Newcastle-upon-Tyne Branch): "Instrumentation in Rocket Propulsion," by Raymond E. Ross.
- Feb. 12. RAEs Agricultural Aviation Group: "Choice of Aerial Vehicle," by N. D. Norman and T. Clutterbuck.
- Feb. 16. Photogrammetric Society: "Re-survey of the Highlands by Photogrammetric Methods," by Maj A. J. D. Halliday.
- Feb. 17. RAEs (Main Lecture at Bristol Branch): "Firestreak," by G. H. F. Brown.
- Feb. 18. RAEs Astronautics and Guided Flight Section: "Missile Control Problems," by D. Best.

RAEs Branch Fixtures (to January 29): Jan 25, Henlow, "Flying-boats," by R. Stanton-Jones. Jan. 27, Southampton, "The Rotodyne," by Dr G. S. Hislop; Weybridge, "Flight Testing at Supersonic Speeds," by Wg Cdr P. Beaumont. Jan. 28, Belfast, "Aircraft in the Modern Army," by Maj D. W. Leach. Jan. 29, Chester, Annual Dance.