

SPORT AND BUSINESS



G-ASBB, the first British-registered Beechcraft Musketeer, was handed over to Mr N. C. Fisher, an engineering company director, by Mr Keith Johnstone of Shorts (UK Beechcraft agents) at Gatwick on December 19. The aircraft, the fifteenth to come off the Beech line at Wichita, will be used by Mr Fisher on business flights within Europe

The Gemini and the Snow-line

It was fairly certain that the Gemini, in a long aircraft life, had seen snow before. What was quite certain was that we had never before seen snow from the Gemini. Furthermore, we were flying over strange territory, there was a margin of half an hour before sunset on our flight-plan time of 2hr, and we were feeling very cold. The reason for this coldness was not far to seek: we had already been sitting in the Gemini for four hours, all the way from Fair Oaks, and the aircraft had no heating. Our stops at Gatwick, Ostend and Luxembourg had all been brief—merely for fuel and formalities. There was no time to waste if the 570 s.m. flight to Landsberg were to be accomplished in daylight, especially as we had lost a precious three-quarters of an hour with a delayed start from Fair Oaks.

We had first felt really cold at Luxembourg, which can be pretty chilly in the wintertime; and it was obvious that if we were cold on the ground we were going to get even colder in the air, sitting for a further two hours in the Gemini. Perhaps this was a factor in what followed: coldness can affect one's reactions as much as fatigue.

It should be explained that our chief navigational aid on this trip was a good pair of eyes, with possible QDMs on our VHF radio. So far, map-reading had gone well: Belgium has many long straight roads radiating from her major towns, and when we took off from Luxembourg there was plenty of ground guidance—the railway running south-east into Karlsruhe, then the autobahn which passes south of Stuttgart *en route* for Augsburg and Munich. We map-read our way without difficulty past Neunkirchen, Homburg and Karlsruhe, and from then on should virtually have followed the autobahn to Munich; for some miles, our track lay along it. But we must have got a little way north of track at Karlsruhe, without noticing it (or had our powers of concentration contracted with the cold?).

We called Stuttgart on 126.7 Mc/s, asking permission to pass through their control zone. This was granted, provided we did not come below 4,000ft. We passed through the northern sector of the zone, over the northern suburbs of the town, and began to notice that the ground to the south-east was all snow-covered. Here was a new complication. In addition to being off track, cold and with a limited amount of daylight, we now saw that landmarks we might hope to use for map-reading were obscured by a white carpet. The Gemini was at the snow-line and we were thus presented with an additional problem.

At times like these, one's mind ranges over all the possibilities. Should we turn back to Stuttgart and be safe rather than sorry? Or should we press on and hope to regain our track and gain our destination before running out of daylight? Our purpose in using

A MORAL TALE FOR MAP-READERS

the Gemini to go to Landsberg had been to accomplish the journey in a day, so as to leave three days for our business there. It would be a pity to abandon the flight on the last leg—which clearly was going to be the most difficult one in its final stage, even without the snow—and delay our arrival.

I made a ten-degree alteration of course to starboard: this should bring us back to the autobahn, which we could hardly fail to pick up. About ten minutes later, we not only saw the autobahn, but also an airfield in a loop of it. This, unmistakably, was Leipzig; I drew in a track from there to Landsberg and calculated a fresh course. When we had turned onto it I called Landsberg on 117.9 Mc/s and asked them for a QDM. Unfortunately they couldn't oblige; but Furstenfeldbruck, the German Air Force base to the north-east of Landsberg, came up with one voluntarily. This was the sort of helpfulness which we were to encounter again on our flight back five days later. It was reassuring to know that, if by any chance we missed Landsberg, we would be able to get to Furstenfeldbruck.

Landsberg airfield lies to the north of the town, close by the River Lech, whose waters looked dark between the snowy banks. It was the river we saw first, then the airfield, with Fouga Magisters on it. This was our destination, and how glad we were to see it! Landsberg Tower gave us permission to join the circuit—left-hand, for piston-engined aircraft—and in two or three minutes we were rumbling along the runway. It wasn't until we got out of the Gemini, by the control tower, that we realized how cold we were; and it wasn't until some hours later, after a drink and a meal, that we really thawed out.

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We stayed in the snowline on that trip, because on the night before we were due to leave Landsberg it snowed again, and we began to have doubts about getting home on schedule. Furthermore, there was an adverse weather report for the Luxembourg area—snow showers and low cloud.

It then occurred to me to check whether we could return via Wildenrath. The met man had said conditions were better to the north, away from the higher ground; and a 'phone call to Wildenrath, put through by one of the RAF squadron leaders at Landsberg, received the encouraging reply that we would be welcome and they would look after us.

I then flight-planned direct to Wildenrath, and from there to Ostend, while my passenger collected rations—cartons of milk and frankfurter rolls. Sqn Ldrs Peter Blake and Ray Lofting were most helpful with computers; we reckoned that the trip would take about 2hr. Actually it took 2hr 20min due to the stronger winds on the last part of our route.

[Continued overleaf]