



UTA is now using a Caravelle 10R for its local services from Nouméa, New Caledonia. The Caravelle is seen here while at Paya Lebar Airport, Singapore, during its positioning flight before being demonstrated in Australia and New Zealand

## AIR TRANSPORT...

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HELPS MMA

**T**HE EXPLOSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT of north-west Australia, where two of three vast iron-ore deposits are already exporting, with the third to follow next year, may result in MacRobertson-Miller Airlines, the West Australian operator, introducing turbojet equipment on its Perth-Darwin trunk route by 1968 or 1969. A slowing of the present rate of economic expansion could mean that the re-equipment would be deferred. MMA executives told a member of the staff of *Flight* in Perth recently that one difficulty is to forecast with certainty the likely growth of traffic, for at the present time the total Perth-to-Darwin passenger uplift averages only 10 passengers per flight. "One DC-9 flight every three weeks would cater for the present Perth-Darwin uplift," said Mr J. Karasek, the commercial manager. The managing director, Captain Cyril Kleinig, said that the Fokker F.28 Fellowship was one aircraft being considered as future MMA equipment—MMA's relationship with Fokker, whose F.27 Friendship at present operates the route, was, he said, "magnificent."

The company is also eager to find a real replacement for the DC-3s which operate its secondary services, many of which serve individual sheep stations in the Kimberley Ranges and elsewhere. No ostensible DC-3 replacement was realistic in terms of price, said Capt Kleinig, "I would like to see a 12-14-seat light twin turboprop on our station services," he said. The Twin Otter had been looked at but was considered both expensive and slow. The Short Skyvan is not considered a sufficiently passenger-appealing aircraft for the role. "The Skyvan is certainly better than it looks, but for a particular role—which is not carrying passengers," said Capt Kleinig. While the low capital costs and depreciation of DC-3s permits their use on the lightly travelled station routes, the company considers that no more than 12 first-class-style seats are required of a potential replacement aircraft—"any more would be a waste of capacity."

MMA is still run by effectively the same management as it was before Ansett Transport Industries bought a 72 per cent share in 1963. The Ansett connection, the managing director emphasised, had increased the company's flexibility by giving it access to ATI resources of equipment. The present fleet comprises four F.27s (one on a long-term lease from Philippine Air Lines), eight DC-3s, a Dove and a Piaggio P.166. The North-west Australia build-up contributed to vast increases in traffic between the operating years 1964-65 and 1965-66, with the passenger-mile figure up by 56 per cent to nearly 88 million; air cargo up by 54 per cent; capacity ton-miles up by 49 per cent; passengers carried up by 42 per cent to nearly 150,000; and revenue hours also up by 42 per cent. The carriage of urgent spares and perishables to the mineral prospecting and exploitation areas largely explains the big cargo increases, but the construction of the \$40 million US Navy Polaris force

communications station at Exmouth Gulf, and NASA satellite tracking stations at Carnarvon and Gove, has also brought much extra traffic to MMA.

Predictably, the Ansett connection has resulted in moves by TAA to cut into the West Australia air transport scene where, previously, all were quite content to see MMA have a virtual monopoly. TAA has had one application to operate between Perth and Darwin rejected, but the desire is known to remain. MMA has State and Federal Government mail contracts which run until 1971. MMA executives expect, ultimately, that they will have competition, but they are not particularly concerned about it now. At the present time Darwin-Perth does not justify more than three flights a week and at the present state of West Australian development, with a gigantic area housing no more than 15,000 people, they consider that to introduce a second operator would be wildly uneconomic. Underlining the sparseness of demand is one statistic about MMA's busiest, and one of its newest routes. It is a DC-3 operation over a stage length of only 11 miles, linking Perth with its resort on Rottnest Island. This is the busiest outstation in the network—with a daily average of only 53 passengers.

The principal operating problems encountered by MMA are poor communication facilities, very sparse meteorological information and sand and stone ingestion resulting from the predominance of unsealed runways. This last problem is steadily being beaten by the gradual construction of sealed runways—though patently the airline would be happy to see the programme accelerated. But there are other difficulties, too, of a more uniquely Australian nature—twice, in the three weeks preceding the *Flight* reporter's visit, aircraft had hit kangaroos on take-off.

**Crash at Bogotá** A US-registered L-1049 (7301-C) on charter from Patssac of Miami to Aerovias Condor de Colombia (Aerocondor) crashed early on December 18 during final approach to Eldorado Airport, Bogotá, after an extra-section flight from Miami. Of the 53 passengers and seven crew, 21, including the two pilots and flight engineer, were killed and ten injured.

**Pony Special** Earlier this month Lloyd International Airways brought the British polo team's ponies back from Argentina. The 26 ponies, accompanied by Lord Patrick Beresford and seven grooms, were flown home by Britannia in three stages with a two-day stop (enforced by landing-rights difficulties) at Recife, to London Gatwick. The ponies, probably in the largest numbers so far to be carried in one aircraft, travelled in open pens.