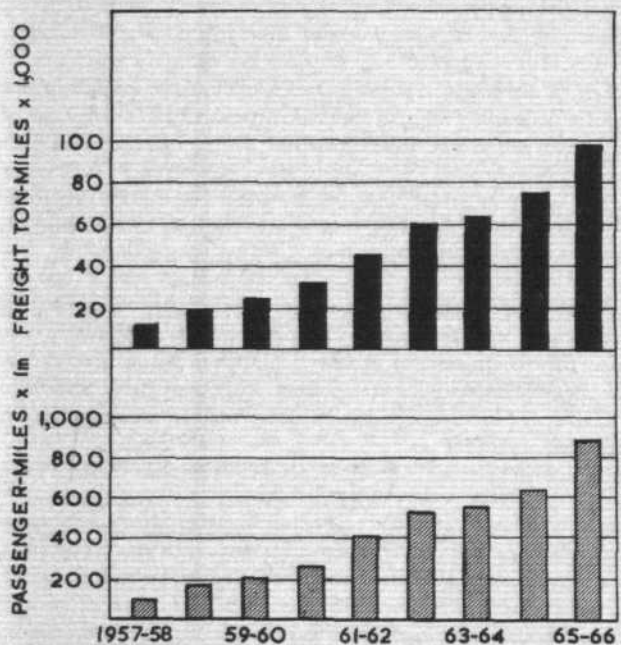


air traffic control. Occasionally, an El Al aircraft has relayed a message from a United Arab or Middle East Airlines aircraft to an ATC centre in friendly territory. In these cases, the Arab airline has instantly stopped transmitting when the Israeli aircraft made its nationality known. El Al crews described this as "childish." From the north-east tip of Africa, airlines and radio aids virtually do not exist. The only aid for about 1,500 miles is an ADF at Mogadishu—and it seldom works. Italian Somalia is unfriendly.

Depending on the weather forecast, El Al take either a westerly course over Djibouti to Nairobi, or an easterly one outside the Somali coastline before turning north-west on a dog's leg back to Nairobi. Flying time is 9½ hours, about five hours more than the direct route would take. If one applies the rule of thumb that a 707 has direct operating costs of £707 per hour, El Al has to attract an extra £3,500 in revenue. Since the fares do not reflect the extra flying hours, the load factor must do so instead. Mr Davidai says the break-even load factor is 85 per cent. This service makes a profit: that 85 per cent is usually achieved.

But there are more hurdles yet. The South African Government restricts El Al's traffic into and out of Johannesburg to



How El Al's cargo and passenger traffic has built up

the 56 passengers which El Al's Constellations used to carry. This means that the 85 per cent load factor to Nairobi must drop to about half that to Johannesburg—a difficult exercise in booking.

The hot and high airfields at Teheran, Nairobi and Johannesburg can limit payload. Nairobi is the principal difficulty on the way north to Teheran: here the 720B is payload-range limited to 24,000lb payload. For the 320B the limit is 35,000lb, here restricted by second-segment climb performance. Paradoxically, this is a characteristic of its high-lift devices: the full-span leading edge flaps. The 420 (with less flap) is not thus limited, but it used to operate very close to the limits of its 200 m.p.h. tyres. Now all El Al 707 variants have 225 m.p.h. tyres. Crews introduce further restrictions. Two full crews fly the Tel Aviv to Nairobi sectors; the resting crew's four bunks deprive the 320B of 18 seats. In Nairobi, both crews rest for about 12 hours while a Nairobi-based crew flies the aircraft to Johannesburg and back. These crew members are stationed in Nairobi with their families for six weeks at a time, during which period they fly only about 50 hours. The Tel Aviv-Nairobi crews always include a supervisory captain because of the route's special

problems. The route's Operations Procedures Manual is also one of the most comprehensive of its type. Most El Al pilots come from the Air Force, and studies have shown that this source will satisfy the airline's needs for ten years at least.

The airline has a 707 simulator at its Lod Airport headquarters, where the chief instructor is Miss Aviva Glezer. Not many women penetrate to important technical posts; Miss Glezer has succeeded not only in this but in mastering eight languages and becoming something of an expert on ancient poetry. She holds an honorary captain's licence—a rare tribute to an outstanding young woman in a man's world. El Al's cabin crew come to the airline after tough military service—for both sexes. They may also have come from *kibbutzim* before that. Consequently they often have rough edges. El Al's training includes a finishing school for stewardesses and frequent refresher courses. The result is cabin staff that are very genuine and quite efficient.

El Al's yearly turnover represents a very high 3½ per cent of Israel's national income, reflecting the carrier's important place in the economy. It is the airline's *strategic* importance to the nation, however, that is behind Israel's opposition to charter business by IATA and non-IATA carriers to Israel. Charter revenue levels will hamper the development the nation needs in its airline; El Al feels that orderly growth inside IATA is best. Thus, it supports IATA's group and promotional fares and has hopes that a planned very low Atlantic winter fare will be low enough to lure Americans to Israel for their annual conventions. The new fares would be low enough to allow Israel to compete with the Caribbean for this traffic.

Of El Al's passengers 92 per cent are tourists, who are, of course, more easily motivated by advertising to visit Israel than are businessmen. For a small airline, the promotion budget of over £1 million is somewhat staggering. The accent is on Israel; "fly El Al" is secondary. Over half Lod Airport's passengers are El Al's already, so this promotional accent cannot lose. The present British tourist currency restrictions are hurting Israel because, for a significant proportion of English tourists, a visit there is a second holiday (perhaps to winter sun) which some are now discarding. Israel's shortage of medium-quality hotels does not help and the Government is now offering loans to correct this.

Israel's recession can serve El Al well. Government spending to reduce unemployment will result in more hotels and an enlarged passenger terminal at Lod. Not all Government policies help, however; to conserve foreign currencies, a severe travel tax on all Israeli citizens adds a flat £30 to every ticket and a further 7½ per cent on the fare. Besides this, there is an airport charge of nearly £1. And all this has to be related to low Israeli wages. One might think El Al has enough difficulties without making extra problems for itself. Last August a violent earthquake rocked eastern Turkey, leaving almost 3,000 people dead. El Al flew first-aid supplies from Israel, and a team of senior medical students from the Hebrew University. From London, the airline flew five tons of supplies first to Lod and then on to Turkey. The cost to Turkey was nothing. El Al wants simply to be friends with everybody.

The attachment or removal of El Al's engine-carrying "fifth pod" on the 707-420s takes only 32 minutes

