

Letters

Air Shows and Accidents

SIR,—The tragic loss of the deputy leader of the Patrouille de France at the conclusion of this year's Paris Salon highlights once again the necessity for strict observance of the rules laid down for the flying display.

As you pointed out in your admirable report, the local Chief of Police at the briefing made it perfectly clear that there was to be absolutely no flying over the crowd, or below 300ft, under pain of prosecution by a civil court. It was regrettable to note that both these rules were disregarded by at least three of the teams—the Red Arrows, Patrouille de France, and the Frece Tricolori, one of whose Fiat G.91s is shown in the accompanying photograph, at about one-sixth of the mandatory height, immediately in front of the spectators.

While I have no intention of belittling the brilliant flying abilities of these teams it is surely not too much to ask that they observe the rules that have been laid down in the interests of public safety? Recently, displays in this country by the Red Arrows have shown a tendency for lower and lower flying; inevitably, if this is allowed to continue, the Paris accident will be repeated here, perhaps with even more tragic consequences. It is indeed miraculous that the Magister did not come down amongst the spectators in whose direction it was pointed at the time of impact. Doubtless we shall never know the reason for the crash, but it appeared to result from an error of judgment in the pull out from the team's final bomb burst.

May I therefore make a plea for the tightening up of display flying regulations; we like to photograph aeroplanes, not funeral pyres.

Thornton Heath,
Surrey

M. J. HOOKS

SIR,—I have just read your very interesting second report of the Paris Air Show entitled "Paris Week." In your comparison of the various aerobatic teams' performances, you mention that the Italian team, with their nine Fiat G.91s, just took top honours with their shattering climax of low passes from all directions. The point I wish to make, which seems to have gone amiss, is that, agreed, the Italians pulled off a shattering climax, but it was, like the rest of their performance, in direct contravention of the principal rule of the show. This rule, of which you make mention later on in your article, was very firmly emphasised by the prefect of police at the briefing of the participating pilots and forbade any flying over the crowd—"jamais, jamais over the crowd."

To my mind the honours were far more deserved by the Red Arrows and the other teams who forewent some of their more spectacular manoeuvres in order to obey the rules of the show.

By the way, besides the top honours which the Italians' shattering climax seemed to earn them, it also earned them a ban from participating in the 1969 Paris Air Show. One wonders who was shattered most.

Caversham,
Reading, Berks

T. J. NELSON

London's Airports

From Viscount Bledisloe QC

SIR,—Before the bulldozers start operating at Stansted, I would suggest that the whole question of the siting of an airport to serve London requires reconsideration.

I would respectfully suggest that the ideal airport site should fulfil the following conditions: (1) Its opera-



"... one-sixth of the mandatory height..." See letter from Mr M. J. Hooks

tion should cause the minimum nuisance to those living nearby. This points inevitably to a site either on the coast or on the Thames Estuary, where the approaches are largely over water. (2) Its operation should cause the minimum nuisance to the inhabitants of London itself. This means that the site should be at some considerable distance from London and not, like Heathrow, so placed that aircraft approaching to land in the prevailing wind conditions fly low over Chelsea and Kensington.

(3) As an international airport it should not only be capable of handling an increasing density of air traffic but should actively encourage the maximum use of its facilities. In this connection Heathrow is engaged in curtailing its traffic in deference to the, very understandable, complaints of the nuisance by noise which is involved. (4) It should be served by a fast system of communication to central London either by conventional rail or monorail.

Heathrow fulfils none of these conditions and the only argument in favour of its retention appears to be that so much money has already been spent on it that it cannot now be scrapped.

This is, I venture to suggest, unsound. If a fundamental mistake has been made the only solution is to cut the loss and start afresh on the right lines. Stansted would appear to me only to make the position worse.

How is it envisaged that in-transit passengers who arrive at Stansted and have to continue their flight from Heathrow should get from one airport to the other? Any railway connecting the two airports would have to be constructed through part of greater London or, if air ferrying between the two airports is contemplated, the noise nuisance to Londoners will be vastly increased.

Surely the answer is to site an airport some 60 to 100 miles from London, with approaches over water, and provide fast rail or monorail communications with Central London, preferably served by Customs officers who could do their work during the journey to London.

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BLEDISLOE

Monitoring Flight-deck Conversation

SIR,—After the two recent tragic accidents involving British-owned aircraft, may I offer a suggestion which could possibly lead to more pre-accident information being available to Ministry investigators?

The idea is basically that all conversation on the flight deck during, say, the last ten miles of the approach is transmitted automatically to a monitoring station within the ATC complex at the receiving airfield. This is, of course, in addition to the normal air/ground communications.

For this purpose it would be necessary to reserve as many VHF frequencies as there would be aircraft on final approach within this distance. A frequency could be allotted to the first aircraft to enter the final approach, another to the second and so on, and when the first aircraft touches down its frequency is re-allocated to another. In order to reduce crew workload, the transmission of conversation could be implemented simply by throwing a switch, thus leaving the crew to go about their normal approach duties, their talk at this time being—presumably—confined to "shop." Any