On the horizon

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Commercial aircraft

THIS YEAR SHOULD see the Lockheed

TriStar gain its FAA certification in April, with first services with Eastern, TWA and Delta to follow shortly afterwards. The European A-300B Airbus is due to fly in October and embark on a flight-test programme scheduled to last about a year. Air France should then take delivery of its first three of six A-300Bs during 1974.
This will be the standard -2 version but the Iberia order, to be fulfilled later, is for the range-stretched -4 variant. The first three prototypes are being built to -1 configuration— almost identical with the -2 but slightly shorter.
By the time the A-300B flies under the power of its General Electric CF6-50s, McDonnell Douglas will probably have delivered the first long-range DC-10 powered by the same engine. The first -20 aircraft with P&W JT9Ds and destined only for Northwest will fly next month, in time for a Novem-ber delivery.
For the first time in several years it looks as if it may be possible to predict orders for Concorde in the spring (at about £13 million a time) without running the risk of spreading prema-ture speculation. BOAC is now show-ing definite interest in the type. By next September 001, 002 and 01 will be joined by the French-assembled second pre-production aircraft, prob-ably fitted with the TBA nozzle. The first production aircraft is due to fly in November. This Aerospatiale-assembled aircraft will be joined by another BAC-assembled Concorde in January 1973.
Dassault should certificate the Mer-cure at the end of this year, ready for first deliveries to Air Inter, and will probably formulate detailed plans for a GE/Snecma CFM56-powered stretched variant. In the smaller-capacity market VFW-Fokker will continue certification flying of the 614 40-seat feederliner, for deliveries in 1973. Powerplant financing prob-lems, however, still dog the pro-gramme.
On the V/Stol front research into system concepts will continue, as will work on a number of solutions to the aircraft design problems. But little hardware is likely to emerge this year. P.M.

The airlines

THE ACID TEST of airlines' efforts to

produce a scheduled fare formula which fills their empty seats will begin in 1972. The intense arguments which have taken place among members of the International Air Transport

Association in 1971 have highlighted some of the differences of approach. Most of the fares have now been agreed, and many of them offer significant reductions—up to 50 per cent—on what was hitherto the going rate for a particular journey.
The big danger from such reduc-tions, which airlines will be watching for especially carefully, is the dilution of the average revenue yield. If this is excessive it will negate the advan-tages of the empty seats and indicate that too many passengers who nor-mally travel at the standard rate are being attracted to the new cheap fares. The result might be a lot of happy customers but no way out of the financial wood in which the air-lines now find themselves.

If, as is now predicted, traffic starts on a firmly upward path, another problem will present itself. Excess capacity has tempted the scheduled airlines to offer more luxurious seat-ing as a competitive ploy. Lounges proliferate and seat pitches lengthen. When the customer has got used to this state of affairs the traffic will again have grown to match capacity, and the airlines will be faced with the tricky task of depriving the customer of his luxury again.
If new creative scheduled fares are successful the charter operators, especially long-haul, could lose a sizable slice of their market. What-ever the outcome, governments will be under increasing pressure to re-examine the charter/scheduled-ser-vice division and decide what roles their airlines should play. The grow-ing plea will be for political status. At least the USA has stated officially that its policy is one of co-existence of route carriers and supple-mentals, and before long it will be having to demonstrate that such a policy is in fact workable.
In the security field much work remains to be done; the FAA for example is concerned that many air-lines and airports are not taking sufficient precautions against hijack-ing. The cost of such precautions is an important influence at airline level. At governmental level the need will be for ratification by countries of international legislation—a field in which movement is generally all too slow. Subsidiary issues, none the less important though, include the cost of proposed satellite systems which air-lines claim are unnecessary, and the continuing fight over the level of air-port and airway user charges.

Traffic, says lata, should pick up in 1972 even though profits will not— at any rate to a satisfactory extent. We will have to wait until 1973 or beyond for that, although few doubt that the cloud has a silver lining— eventually. D.H.W.

Defence and

military aircraft

DEFENCE BEING a particularly volatile sector of the aviation scene, it is not easy to identify those events of 1971 that will continue to reverberate through 1972. With the exception of military contracts due for delivery this year—C-130s for Belgium, a hand-full of Hunters to Switzerland in the autumn to name but two—most of the 1972 defence news will be spontaneous.
Nevertheless, it is worth looking at some features of last year which, if carried through to this year, will help to formalise the shape of military aviation for the remainder of this decade and for much of the next.
Progress with the American B-1A— now in the mock-up form and with the majority of the contracts let— is such that, given continued Con-gressional support, validation of the final design this year is virtually cer-tain.
Russia, too, is occupied with an advanced manned bomber, in this case the variable-geometry Backfire. It has been suggested in some military circles, with a certain amount of cynicism, that America is only pro-gressing with the B-1A to allay rumours of inferior technology to that of the USSR in advanced manned air-craft. A more realistic as well as charitable assessment would be that both countries see the need for an across-the-board capability, feeling that, at strategic levels, reliance on missiles alone could be a fatal error. In the case of America this insurance policy is estimated at $2,618 million for B-1A development.
Among other projects coming to fruition this year is the Anglo-French Sepecat Jaguar, with the forming of the first French Air Force squadron. The first British squadron will form in 1973.

In July the Royal Swedish Air Force will have had the formidable Viggen in its inventory for a year, equipping the first operational-conversion unit; front-line strength is scheduled to reach 175 in the first instance, although when the project was first presented a total production run of 800 aircraft was foreseen.

In Britain the Hawker Siddeley Harrier is expected to be evaluated for maritime use some time this year, for which role the aircraft will be fitted with a lightweight nose radar and a new nav-attack system. While on the subject of the Harrier, there is growing optimism regarding its chances, in the Swiss strike-aircraft competition, although the present short-list only involves the LTV Cor-sair II and the Dassault Milan. A deci-