T International. 2 January 1975

v h the SR.N5, the Westland SR.N6 forms the backbone of amphibious I development and operates all over the world. The skirt—first de-
/ oped on SR.NI—is seen in these two views, below, inflated and lapsed

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1959 NRDC had set up Hovercraft Development Ltd (HDL) to maintain liaison with the SR.NI contract and to find licensees for hovercraft manufacture. After the initial success of SR.NI, HDL licensed four British companies: Westland (which by then had taken over Saunders-Roe), Hawker Siddeley, Vickers and William Denny. All except Hawker Siddeley developed hovercraft which operated on embryo commercial services. Westland and Vickers merged in 1966 to form the British Hovercraft Corporation, from which Vickers withdrew in 1970. Denny built a sidewall design, the D2, which carried passengers on the Clyde and the Thames, but the company went into liquidation in 1963. The sidewall craft concept was then carried for-

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Left, Be// Aerospace Canada's Voyageur, a 40-ton amphibian, offloading
a cargo of oil drums at Tuktoyaktuk, North West Territories, while ice-locked ships wait out the winter in the background. Above A 10,000-
ton helicopter carrier concept by Bell Aerospace which is already designing a 2,000-tonner for the US Navy

ward by a group of Denny employees and others into Hovermarine Ltd, which produced the HM.2. This com-pany, formed in 1965, went into liquidation in 1969, its assets being bought by an American company which created Hovermarine' Transport Ltd. Hovermarine still makes HM.2s, and last year started production in Florida. Thus, within three years two of the original four licensees had withdrawn from the field, with the remaining two merging in 1966. The pattern of entry and departure from the industry persisted during the mid-1960s, leaving in 1975 just three manufacturers of "large" ACVs—i.e. over ten tons—and six manufacturers of craft under that size. Abroad the pattern has been slower to develop, although it has done so more consistently in the field of large craft, with Bell (USA), Mitsui (Japan), Sedarn (France) and at least two Russian manufacturers being active over the past ten years. In the small-craft field abroad the failure rate of companies, and craft, has been greater than that in Britain, and even now the base for light-hovercraft technology is strongest in Britain.

Westland's SR.N-line produced one-off Nl, N2 and N3 prototypes, the latter being rolled out in October 1963. In the following year the SR.N5 18-seat craft was rolled out, followed in 1965 by the SR.N6 38-seater. These two craft, it is fair to say, were and still are the backbone of amphi-bious ACV development. They have been modified for cargo, survey, and various specialist military operations, and have operated all over the world. The basic craft has been stretched, reskirted and fitted, in one case, with twin propellers, and the production line is still active.

The much larger 190-ton SR.N4 entered service in 1968 and five have been sold, all for English Channel operations. After six years of operations the two companies were just