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COMMERCIAL

"^BUSINESS Lear and his ne w Star

At the age of 73, Bill Lear, pioneer in avionics and designer of the Learjet, could contemplate his distinguished past or be happy with his pleasant present activities and surroundings. But Lear only thinks of the future. He's planning a new, lighter, better autopilot, a light-aircraft yaw-damper, and a 30-seater which he says will be a versatile and economical business jet, feederliner or small freighter. WARREN GOODMAN reports from Stead, Nevada.

T

HE distinguished past, the satisfying present and the
great hopes for the future of William Powell Lear
are all much in evidence in his office in Stead, Nevada.
The past is there in framed pictures, citations and other memorabilia of Lear's career as an outstanding inventor and designer in aviation. They help remind the visitor that the soft-spoken, friendly man behind the desk is the holder of more than 140 patents, and has a record of many "firsts" in aviation—the first navigational radio for light aircraft, the first successful radio direction-finder for aircraft, the first lightweight aircraft automatic pilot, and the first successful business jet. They also help recall thait Lear founded, built and sold two well known companies— an avionics company (Lear Inc, now Lear Siegler), which he sold in 1962, and an aircraft manufacturer (Learjet, now Gates Learjet) sold in 1967.
Place of honour among the keepsakes is occupied by a small sculpture on Bill Lear's desk. Like the US Con-gressional Medal of Honour or the Victoria Cross, it is itself inconspicuous but nevertheless tremendously im-pressive for what it represents. It is the Collier Trophy, aviation's highest award, which was given to Bill Lear in 1949 "for developing automatic means of safe landing jet fighter aircraft in all weather."
But the past, impressive as it is, is shouldered aside by the flurry of present activity in Lear's office, in the Learavia Corporation plant, and on the airport visible from the office window. The visitor sees a tremendous expanse of "high desert," a 3,000-acre slice of the former Stead Air Force Base north of Reno, which Lear bought in 1967 as the headquarters for Learavia, Lear Motors and for industrial development.
The hangar across the road from the Learavia head-quarters houses the fixed-wing and helicopter flight- and ground-school which Lear is running in co-operation with the University of Nevada. It also houses the Learavia helicopter service, with seven helicopters for charter, including one with a 5,0001b lift capacity. The hangar is

Above, 6/7/ Lear demonstrates against his office wall the comparative sizes of the current Learjet 25 and his proposed Learstar 600 corporate
and commuter design. Simple design and lightweight construction are characteristics of the Lear AFC-75 autopilot now entering production, below

also a fixed-base operation offering a "complete aviati service for all types of aircraft."
The Learavia plant itself turns out mufflers for Bel helicopters, sound-suppressors designed for the Lea (but adaptable to any jet engine in the 2,0001b-4,000 thrust range), and small machined components for vario

aircraft. In another part of the plant, Lear Motors is producing a deep-well pump motor which can be lowere
3,000ft into a well to bring geothermally heated wate to the surface.
In Bill Lear's office the past and the present are rare mentioned; the talk is all of the future. Lear told Fligh that the company is just going into production on a ne yaw-damper for single- and multi-engine aircraft and w soon be turning them out at the rate of 20 a month. says: "It will take the Dutch roll and tail wiggle out of even the lightest plane, and it will weigh only about nin pounds."

Learavia is also about to start production on "an autpilot which will weigh about 151b installed and will do
everything that everyone has always wanted an autop to do, including bring you right down to touchdown." Th unit, which Lear calls the AFC-75, uses an extremely sm panel control unit (51

2inX31

8in) and is connected to
remote computer assembly by only 16 wires, instead the 70 or 80 wires required in other installations.

Lear also described a motor-generator for servmechanisms which will be in production shortly: "There
nothing like it on the market. It will probably sell for about ten to twelve dollars. It can be used for any so of servo-mechanism you have to start and stop instan and it will have a very accurate speed control."
Lear's favourite subject of conversation, however, what he always refers to as "the new plane." He proud showed Flight the fuselage mock-up and plans for t