LETTERS

Are

computers
a threat to

airmanship?
SIR—Your editorial "Chain
Reaction" (Flight, Oct 8),
relating to the misfortunes of
KAL007, would have been
more suitable, perhaps, as a
preface to the excellent
edition which you devoted to
computers in aviation and
FMS. A machine or a
computer is only as good as
the guy who operates/
program it (one of avia-
tion's Ten Commandments?).
Better refined and, most
importantly, less complex
FMS units will rapidly
become "standard fit" in
commercial airliners because
their navigational accuracy
and fuel economy benefits
cannot be ignored.

A major problem has arisen,
however, which flightdeck
procedures must eliminate. It
is that FMS and other
computers applied to aviation
are programmed by "out-
siders"—unlike good old
steam INS, which is pilot
programmed and cross
checked within the flight-
deck. Put another way, we are
seeing an important feature of
that indefinable quality called
airmanship becoming chal-
lenged by the laboratory based
computer programmer.

On my own fleet, which is
currently retrofitting FMS,
errors in the programming of
"company routes" have
already manifested them-
selves. Appropriate warnings
at flight briefing are now a
familiar feature of flight plan-
ning. Fortunately our well-
thought-out flightdeck pro-
cedures, together with the
awareness of our pilots, has
identified these incorrect
programmes at the earliest
opportunity. Within the pilot
fraternity the problem is
known as the "Mount Erebus
syndrome".

Throughout our industry
can we yet be sure that all the
questions raised in the after-
math of that tragedy be
considered as fully answered?
Man has proved that he can
misprogram his own INS; and
he has proved that a third
party can lead him well up the

garden (flight) path. Do we
have the discipline and
procedures developed suffici-
ently to ensure that such
errors will never happen
again?
In conclusion, I must
categorically disagree with
your editorial assumption
that the crew of KAL 007
most likely selected their
flight mode selector switch
to "INS" at a point on
airway R20 where transfer to
HF 55B communica-
tion occurs—some ljhr-2hr
"downroute"!

Airway R20 is now re-
opened, and I operated the
route two days ago. Anchorage
departure control released us
from the Anchorage 8 SID
within 5min of our take-off
and duly cleared us "direct
Cairn Mountain J501 Bethel
VOR—flight planned route"
(i.e. Awy R20). This very typi-
cal clearance is the "trigger"
to select INS on the mode
selector switch (still within
ten miles of Anchorage
airport). Unless radar control,
weather avoidance, etc,
dictate otherwise, the switch
will most definitely remain in
INS throughout the flight
until under radar control in
the terminal area of one's
destination.

I trust your Flight journalist
featured on the BBC
programme doesn't imagine
that we plough through the
European or USA airways
system in HEADING mode?
Any crew blessed with an INS
(FMS) equipped aeroplane
will elect to employ their
primary area navigation aid at
the earliest opportunity.
Flight is acting irresponsibly
by involving itself in
"guessing theorems" pertain-
ing to an aeroplane disaster
where little or no hard
evidence exists. We expect a
much higher reporting
etiquette of our leading indus-
try publication.

ANTHONY J. A. PELL

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[The heading reference mode
theory is that of the UK Civil
Aviation Authority, based on
experience of Gross Navi-
gational Errors occurring
on Atlantic routes. Flight
International was reporting
that theory, not inventing
it.-ED.]

The DC-2

was a

winner . . .
SIR—Reference John Fraser's
letter (October 22) concerning
the MacRobertson Air Race, I
did in fact "twig" the state-
ment about the DC-2 being
the winner. In fact both the
DC-2 and the D.H. Comet
were winners. The DC-2 in
the Transport-Handicap sec-
tion and the Comet in the
outright speed class.

I was more financially
rewarded than was Mr Fraser
on this event, because I
received a prize of ten bob for
winning my school competion
consisting of essays on the
participants, their aircraft,
and the route, plus predicting
two of the first three arrivals.
A. E. HA WES
Hants & Sussex Aviation
The Airport Service Road
Portsmouth
Hants
P035PJ

. . . after a

fashion
SIR—I refer to your article on
Page 800 of Flight for
September 24, regarding the
DC-2 which you state won the
London to Melbourne Air
Race. May I ask what about
Scott and Black who flew the
DH-88 Comet G-ACSS
Grosvenor House ?
Scott and Black were
placed first in both the speed
and handicap race. But, as
laid down in the rules drawn
up by the Royal Aero Club
for the MacRobertson Inter-
national Air Race, they
could only claim one prize, so
naturally they took the
winner's prize of £10,000 in
the speed event. This meant
that Parmentier and Moll in
the DC-2, who came second
overall, were to receive the
winner's prize of £2,000 in the
Handicap, and Melrose in the
D.H. Puss Moth the second
prize, although he came third.
The second prize in the speed
event, which Parmentier and
Moll could not claim because
they had the first prize in the
handicap event, went to the
colourful Roscoe Turner and

Pangborn, flying the Boeing
247D.
As a footnote to the above,
it is interesting to note that
six of the first eight aircraft to
arrive in the 1934 Air Race
were British—two D.H.
Comets, one D.H. Dragon
Rapide, one D.H. Puss Moth,
one Airspeed Courier, and one
Miles Hawk.
What if the race were to be
held in its centenary year?
HOWARD J. ROSE
"Berry Barton"
8 Engliff Lane
Pyrford
Woking GU22 8SU

Airbus is

international
SIR—Your engineer (Letters,
October 22) clearly lives in the
land of those who look at
France and everything French
through the eyes of Renault 5
owners, Boursin eaters, and
terrace cafe dreamers.

I dare say that the French
equivalent who puts England
in a pinstripe suit, behind the
wheel of an open MG with a
Burberry in the back, might
think that the Airbus is
frightfully British—after all, a
bird cannot fly without wings
(French logic).
His remarks remain sans
commentaire, but if he really
believed in his convictions
why did he not identify
himself?

Actually, the only people to
be forgiven for thinking the
Airbus French are those
casual transport-vehicle-
enthusiast visitors to French
aeronautical press news-
stands who are unable to read
between the lines.
F. J. ESSEX
194 Rue Legendre
75017 Paris
France

WHAT'S ON
November 16-17 RAeS Rotorcraft
Section: Two-day symposium: "Euro-
pean helicopter operations*; details from
section secretary, 4 Hamilton Place,
London W1; tel 01-499 3515.

November 16 RAeS Main Society at
Brough Branch: Sir George Cayley
Memorial Lecture: The future in space,
by G. Pardoe, General Technology
Systems; tel 01 -499 3515.
November 17 RAeS Main Society at
Belfast Branch: 23rd Short Brothers
Memorial Lecture, by M. I. Wild; tel
01-499 3515.
November 17 RAeS/SLAET London
Airport Joint Branch: "Face the Press',
by Michael Donne, aerospace corre-
spondent, Financial Times; The Cinema,
BA Training Centre, Cranebank, Heath-
row Airport; 6.15 p.m.; contact Ian
Brown; tel 01-750 5603.

1314 FLIGHT International, 12 November 1983