airships for America

chosen. "What is important about this
contract is that the US Navy has specified
airships from the start. It has not said it is
looking for an airborne early warning
(AEW) aircraft—it wants airships. So the
US Navy is giving airships its vote of confidence, which gives us great strength," says Airship Industries.
London-based AI is now enjoying financial stability provided by its large Australian mother company, Bond Corporation, which took up 81-4 per cent of AI's stock in 1984. The company's first airship, 500-01, was built in
1978 with funding from a
Venezuelan consortium.

"When this company
started building airships there
was no legislation governing
them. We had to educate the
Civil Aviation Authority to do
its job and help it draft the
required legislation," says AI.
"The legislation is now known
as Section Q, and is the first of
its kind in the world since the
1930s.

"In November 1984 we
received full passenger certifi-
cation for the 500 Series—a
big turning point. It has been
quite a struggle for a number
of years, and we have had the
'Airship Albatross' hanging
around our neck, but that is
now largely dispelled. The
public is now aware of the
safety of airships, and with
that behind us we can move
ahead".

AI now has airships flying
all over the world. 600-01
is at RAF Cardington in
the UK, being flight-tested
for passenger certification.
600-02 is in Australia, 500-05
is in Japan, and there are five
AI airships in the United

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States; 600-04, for instance, is conducting trials with the US Air Force.

AI sees the US Navy's requirement involving a fleet of oceanic surveillance airships, capable of long endurance, which will be organic to the fleet and under the fleet commander's control. Its main role will be to guard against anti-ship sea-skimming missiles, although it will also have communications relay and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) roles.
As a prototype for Nasp, AI is proposing its 50,000m3

Sentinel 5000, optimised to

Far left Airships dominated the skies over New York during the July 4 celebrations, when a blimp race was staged. Left Airship Industries' proposed gondola. Below AI's concept of the maritime surveillance airship in operation

suit the requirements of this particular programme. If selected, the actual pro-duction aircraft would probably be a 9000. Details of this variant are sketchy, but the 9000 would need to have considerable commonality with the prototype.
"We are using proven technologies and keeping technical risk to a minimum," says AI. "We have been flying these airships for a number of years, we have done a great deal of the basic research, and we are now in a position to build these larger ships. In its whole it will be totally revolutionary, but in its composite parts it will be totally proven," says AI. The 5000, though, is still only a design.

The company maintains that to lose the US Navy contract would be extremely disappointing, but would not be the end of the world. There are other possible contracts which will be worth chasing; the Royal Australian Air Force, for instance, is now considering using AEW airships. But it has to be said that AI would be hard-put to construct the 5000, which it is also considering for civilian purposes, using its own funding.

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