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Front cover: MBB's BO. 108, which made its maiden flight on October 15 last year, is the subject of Chris Dreiser's feature on pages 19-22.

OUR VIEW_

Relief misplaced
Any feeling of relief brought on by

. confirmation that the Pan Am
747 disintegrated over Lockerbie as a
result of an explosion, rather than of a
primary structural failure, is relief
misplaced.
That an explosive device capable of setting off the apparently instantaneous failure of an aircraft structure should have been placed on board is worrying in the extreme. Whether or not it was the group which boasted in advance that it would do exactly this on the route in question which actually planted the explosive device is immaterial.
What matters is that a substantial explosive device did end up on an aircraft whose passengers and luggage had been through the security systems of either one or two of the western world's most-respected and "safe" airports, Frankfurt and London Heathrow, and of one of the most senior airlines, Pan American. Whether or not warnings were given to the right people or passed on to the right people, or acted upon by the right people, is secondary.
There must be few purveyors of secu-rity equipment who would be so bold as to claim 100 per cent certainty of detecting explosives in baggage, just as there would be few—if any—security chiefs who would claim* 100 per cent certainty of detecting the terrorists who might wish to plant those explosives. Even in the aftermath of the Lockerbie disaster and all the fine words which it-generated, few amongst airline staff, airport operators, or passengers would want security to be tightened to the levels seen at Israeli airports.
Security must, however, be improved
if such terrorist acts are to become more difficult to perpetrate. Perhaps the assumption that baggage cannot be tampered with after it has been through

security checks is one which must be challenged. Perhaps the widespread use of sniffer dogs or machines looking for explosives in departing luggage should be seen as being as important as the use of sniffer dogs looking for drugs in incoming baggage. Until the history of the Pan Am explosive is tracked, there can be no good served by speculation or setting blame—but there can be good served by a re-appraisal of existing security techniques and systems. Serious though that may be, the attri-bution of the Lockerbie disaster to explosives must perversely do even greater long-term damage by taking the spotlight off the increasingly worrying spectre of structural failure. All the time that alarming failures such as the recent Eastern Airlines 727 incident by some miracle do not become catastrophic, the structural integrity of the older jets will continue to go largely unchallenged.
In the worst cases, localised strength-ening or repair will be recommended or directed, but such work will only happen after a failure has been detected. Long-term fatigue testing should enable the majority of failures to be predicted, but failure prediction lags behind failure detection as airframes find new ways of failing.
It is forces far beyond the compre-hension of aircraft designers, operators and passengers which have determined ' that the Lockerbie incident was an apparent near relative of the Air India 747 crash, rather than a frightening extension of the Aloha 737 failure. That it was the former should be of no comfort to designer, operator or passenger: that it was not the latter should not be a cause for relief so much as a cause for wonder that what so many regard as the inevitable should have been again postponed.

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