

COMMERCIAL AVIATION

— AIRLINES — AIRPORTS —

THIS AIR MAIL BUSINESS

Why has one company been given an Air Mail contract on the first day of its operation when another has been placed on an unreasonably long probationary period?

A contributor demands a clear statement

THE majority of our internal air lines have still to prove themselves fit to carry freight as sacred as His Majesty's mails, and the Postmaster-General would only have been showing intelligent caution if he had put each operating company on a reasonable period of probation.

When, however, Railway Air Services, Ltd., were given the mails on their very first day of operation most people felt that the G.P.O. was showing an intelligent appreciation of modern conditions which was both surprising and refreshing.

Such a feeling has proved to be premature. Apparently it applied only to certain favoured companies, for there is at least one which has flown a difficult route for more than six months with almost 100 per cent. regularity, and yet this company cannot obtain mails to carry. When the postal authorities were approached they informed the company that air mail questions could only be discussed after the route had been flown for six months throughout the winter.

So here we have two commercial companies, one of which hoists the coveted air mail pennant on its inaugural flight, and the other, after six months' successful operation, is informed by the Postmaster-General that a full year's probationary flying is necessary.

Not unnaturally, some explanation of this extraordinary preferential treatment was asked for, and the answer reported to have been given by the authorities was certainly amazing. It was, one is informed, to the effect that the railway companies had had a great deal of experience of carrying mail bags in trains, and that they also had considerable knowledge of the ground organisation of the G.P.O. Possibly there is precedent for this. Did a group of stage coach magnates find one of the early railway companies and obtain preferential treatment because they knew how to stow mail bags in the "boot" and on account of their knowledge of how to hand mails to the post office on arrival?

The carriage of mails by air is quite the simplest business that can be undertaken by an air traffic company. Sealed mail bags are handed in at one end and given into the charge of the postal authorities at the other. Even interrupted flights present no difficulties. It is only necessary to telephone for instructions and place the mails in charge of the guard on the next train. It may be mentioned that air companies, both British and foreign, have been carrying mails to and from the Continent for years without experience of railway trains or of the ramifications of postal organisation at home or abroad. What is needed by the G.P.O. is a regular, well-organised air service and a little common sense.

There is another aspect of this business. Railway Air Services, Ltd., is a purely commercial undertaking seeking to establish air routes wherever these may seem now or in the future to be profitable. There is no reason, therefore, why it should not put a service on the route now flown by the firm already placed on a year's probation. If this occurs, will the air mail pennant be triumphantly hoisted when the first Railway Air Service machine takes off, and will the older company, with all its experience of that particular route, need to say farewell to all chance of mail carrying?

On the face of it, all internal air transport companies must be regarded as equal, but everybody knows that some have great financial resources whilst others are making a fight with very small capital.

It would be quite logical if the postal authorities were to show a preference for the wealthy companies, and if this is the case, why do they not say so bluntly instead of making all sorts of excuses? Great resources, after all, should mean better services.

The smaller companies would then know where they stood, and would realise that however good a show they put up, they would obtain little or no encouragement from the G.P.O.

"RICHARD CARVETH."



THE LATEST WIBAULT: This Wibault 366 carries five passengers, or the mail equivalent, at a cruising speed, it is reported, of 190 m.p.h. It is of particular interest, if only because the engine, an Hispano-Suiza, 12 Ybr. (860 h.p.), is water-cooled—which is rare in a commercial machine to-day.