

# The Outlook

## A Running Commentary on Air Topics

### Trade Follows Records

ON the eve of the greatest long-distance air race which has ever taken place the hopes of all Britons turn towards the three or four British entries. One of these machines, we fervently hope, will win the speed race. Hope, however, is far removed from assurance, and the chances are so many on the Mildenhall-Melbourne course that prophecy would be vain and betting a folly. We should not dream of counting our chickens before they are hatched. *But*—if a Briton should win, the feat would set British aircraft design upon a pinnacle of glory and would have far-reaching effects.

A couple of years ago the British aeronautical star (not then a comet) was very much in the ascendant. We held the three F.A.I. records which really matter, namely, speed, distance and altitude. Now all those three have gone abroad, and foreign buyers who are apt to judge national designing ability by success in record-making were left free to assume that British design no longer held first place. The Royal Air Force has not been allowed to make any attempt to recover any of the three, two of which had been established by the Service. Financial stringency has been the official excuse for letting these three records go abroad without a British attempt to recover them. In times of real depression such an excuse has to be accepted. When a measure of prosperity has returned the matter should be reconsidered. To economise by letting these records go seems to us like the case of a farmer who economises by not buying seed for his next year's crop.

The Atlantic record of passenger steamers also affords an analogy. The German *Bremen* beat the British *Mauretania*, and then lost the Blue Riband to the Italian *Rex*. It is hoped that the *Queen Mary*, built partly by a Government subsidy, will bring the Blue Riband back to this country. On the Atlantic it is acknowledged that trade follows the holding of that distinction. In export of aircraft, trade also follows the holding of records. If we win the MacRobertson race our prestige will be greatly enhanced, but we should not rest content with that. The records for speed, altitude and distance ought to be recovered for Great Britain.

### Re-Equipment

AT long last a decision has been taken about the new equipment for No. 202 (Flying Boat) Squadron. This squadron is stationed at Malta, and for more years than most people can remember it has been flying Fairey 3F floatplanes, which have been described in the *Air Force List* as "temporary" equipment. Certainly some very fine work has been done with the Fairey floatplanes, but a flying boat squadron without flying boats has been an anomaly. Why the squadron was not given "Southamp-ton" years ago is one of the mysteries which the future historian of the R.A.F. will find it hard to explain. However, to come to modern history, there was talk about a year ago of moving No. 202 Squadron back to home waters and replacing it at Malta with No. 209 (F.B.) Squadron when it had changed its "Iris" boats for "Perths," and finding boats for No. 202 when it had reached Mount Batten. Then, for some technical reason, it was decided not to send the "Perth" squadron to the Mediterranean, so No. 202 continued to rest on twin floats for a further period, while the Air Ministry cogitated on the situation.

Now, at last, it is announced that the long-enduring No. 202 Squadron is to get the Supermarine "Scapa" with two "Kestrel" engines, and to get it within the next few months. There will be rejoicing in the messes at Calafra, for the "Scapa" is a very fine flying boat, with good speed, good load, and good endurance. Perhaps some of the fitters who have to perform the toilets of the two "Kestrels" perched aloft beneath the upper planes may sigh for the brave days of old, but the pilots will scour the Mediterranean with a new sense of power, and a very great joy.

It is also announced that No. 36 (Torpedo-Bomber) Squadron is to shed its time-honoured "Horsleys" and their not-so-well-beloved "Condor" engines in favour of "Vildebeests" with "Pegasus" engines. This will make the landplane station at Singapore homogeneous, for No. 100 (Bomber) Squadron, which shares the station with No. 36 B.S., already has the "Vildebeest." The "Wapiti," after doing fine work for a number of years, is now giving place to the "Vincent" and "Hardy" out East, and to the "Hart" in this country. No. 84 (Bomber) Squadron at Shaibah, near Basra, was the first squadron to get the "Wapiti," and it is now to have the "Vincent." No. 605 (County of Warwick) (Bomber) Squadron is also shedding the "Wapiti," in favour of the "Hart."

### Publication of Accident Reports

A FORTNIGHT ago we commented on the position as regards publishing the official reports on air accidents, and expressed the hope that there would be no delay in telling the public what the causes were (so far as they could be ascertained) of the three tragic crashes which took place within ten days. So far as we know, no report on any of the three has yet been published. Admittedly it takes a certain amount of time to examine all the wreckage, when there is wreckage to examine, and to deduce from the fractured parts what was the probable cause of the disaster. It is also understood that Major Cooper, the very able Inspector of Accidents at the Air Ministry, and his assistants are unfortunately over-busy. If so, that department ought to be strengthened, even at the risk of thoughtless critics complaining that money is being spent on Air Ministry officials instead of upon practical flying. Promptness in publication of accident reports has a direct bearing on public confidence in air transport. The public memory is long as regards generalities but short as regards precise facts. If too long a time has elapsed between an accident and the official explanation of the cause, the public will have forgotten all the details of the accident and will take but a passing interest in reading the report. Many people will, nevertheless, carry away a general impression that "these aeroplanes are very dangerous things: they are always crashing and killing people." The way to counter that way of thought is to get out a simple explanation of the accident while the event is still fresh in the minds of readers of newspapers. Recommendations for preventing a repetition of that particular sort of accident should accompany the report. Even sympathy for the relations of a pilot who has made an error of judgment should not curtail the frankness of the publication. If pilots need more training in, say, instrument flying, before being given charge of a passenger aeroplane, let that be said openly, and let steps be taken to put the matter right. In that way will public confidence in air transport be restored.