

Blackburn Firebrand

Appraisal of the Latest British Fleet Air Arm Aircraft :
Excellent Performance a

DESPITE the fact that the machine here discussed, although a wartime product, never had the chance offered it to engage in operation, a new naval aircraft from a British manufacturer is always something of an event and, equally, is always interesting, particularly from the aspect of estimating how well the designer has effected a compromise in meeting the diverse requirements.

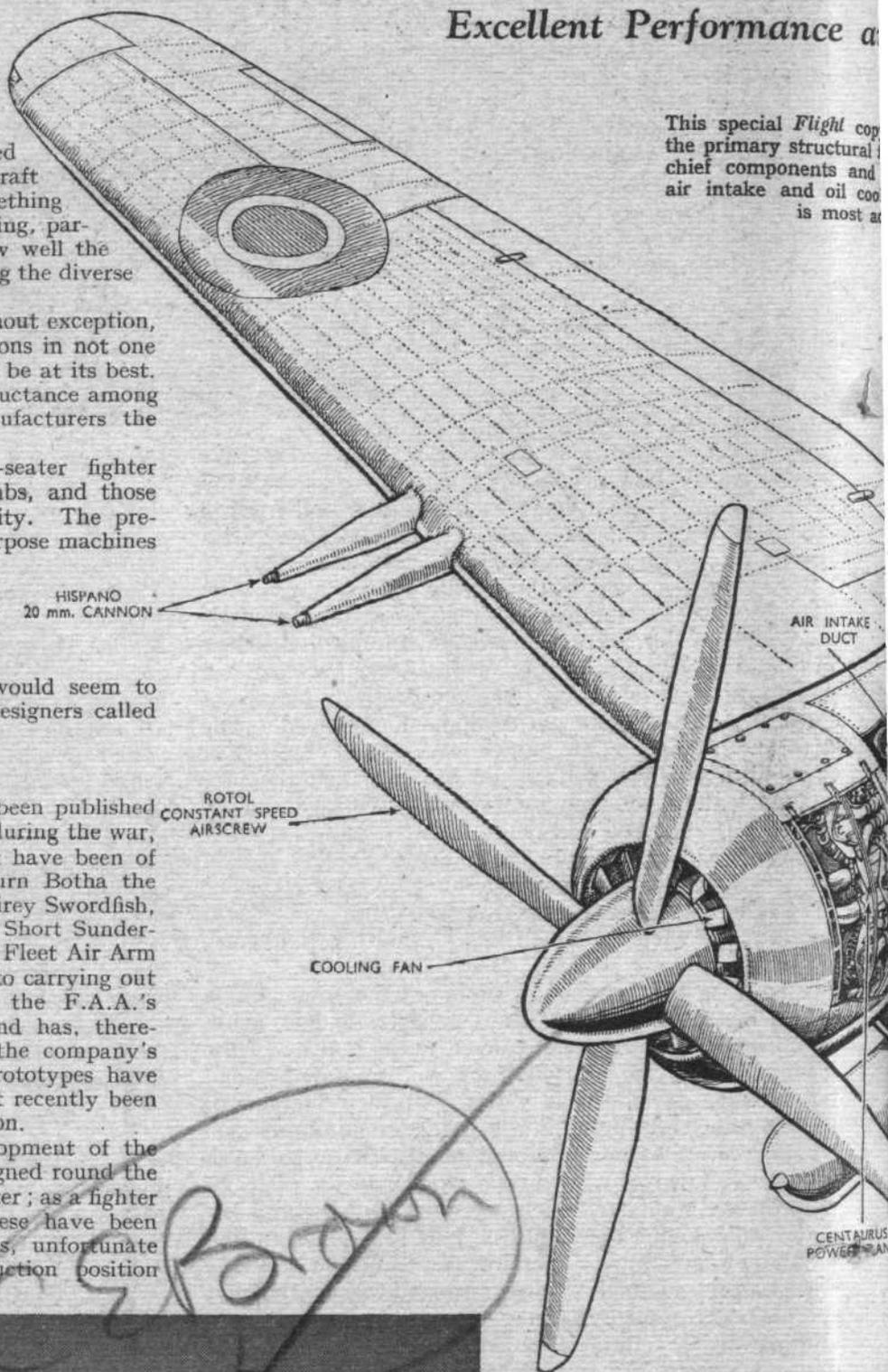
Machines of the F.A.A. have, almost without exception, been designed to fulfil a host of odd functions in not one of which the aircraft could really be said to be at its best. There would appear to still be a distinct reluctance among our naval hierarchy to give British manufacturers the instructions to build specialist machines.

The Blackburn Firebrand is a single-seater fighter torpedo aircraft which can also carry bombs, and those few words imply a whole sphere of activity. The previous remarks upon the subject of single-purpose machines should not be read as a foregone reflection on the Firebrand. In point of fact the machine has been so cleverly conceived that almost it could be said to be a specialist in each of its three operational functions which, if multi-purpose aircraft we must have, would seem to be the desirable goal of the unfortunate designers called upon to evolve them.

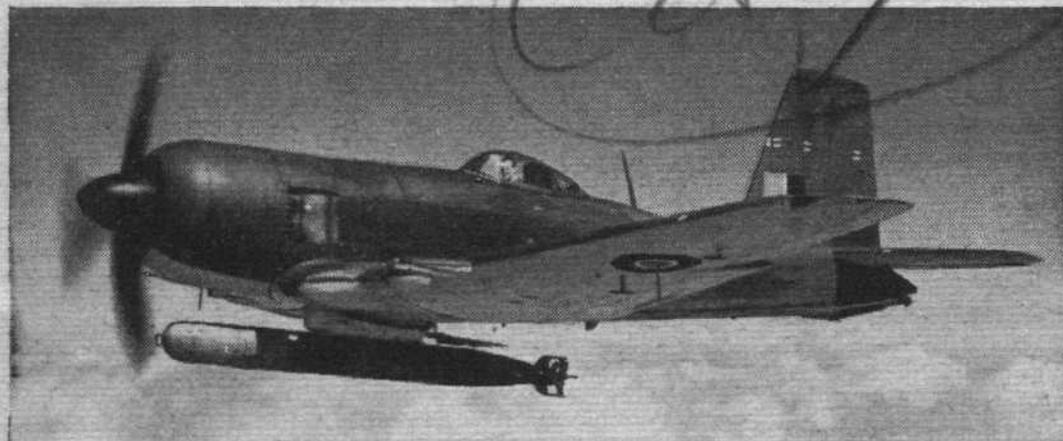
Wartime Activities

For security reasons, relatively little has been published about the work of the Blackburn company during the war, and additionally, because the aircraft built have been of other firms' designs. Besides the Blackburn Botha the company has produced large numbers of Fairey Swordfish, Barrucas and, in the Dumbarton works, Short Sunderlands. An extensive repair organisation for Fleet Air Arm aircraft has also been operated in addition to carrying out essential modification work on many of the F.A.A.'s American aircraft. Work on the Firebrand has, therefore, been only a relatively small part of the company's total war effort, and although the first prototypes have been flying since 1942, the machine has but recently been put into anything like large-scale production.

The present Mk. IV is a natural development of the Mk. I Firebrand, which was originally designed round the then new Napier Sabre engine as a fleet fighter; as a fighter it mounted four 20 mm. cannon, and these have been retained in the Mk. IV. It was, perhaps, unfortunate for the Firebrand that the engine production position



This special *Flight* copy shows the primary structural chief components and air intake and oil cooling system in most detail.



In flight the Firebrand looks what it is—a clean and powerful aircraft. The neat carriage of the torpedo is particularly noteworthy.