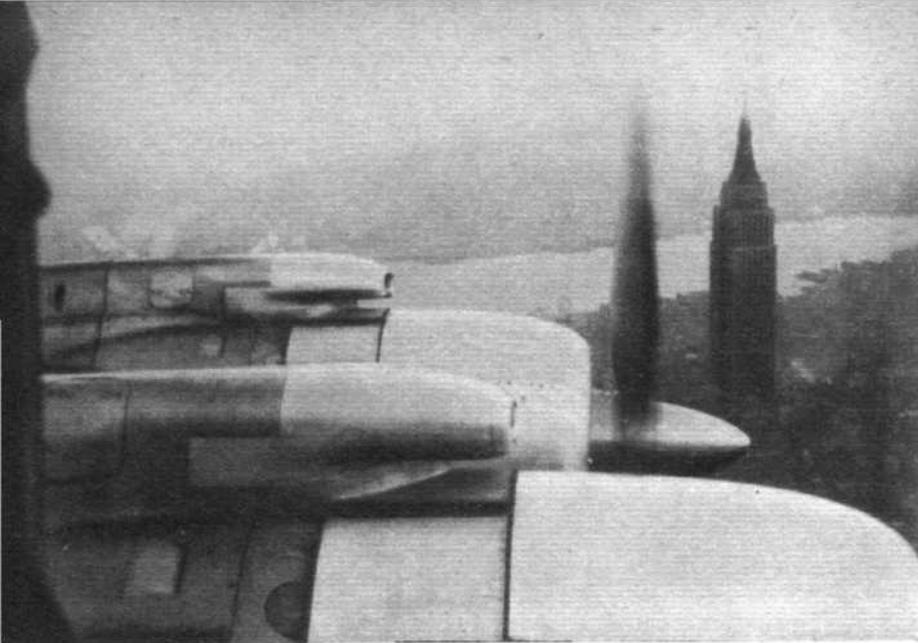


SEVEN SEAS OVERTURE

B.O.A.C. Inaugurate Transatlantic DC-7C Services: Impressions of a Training Flight

Illustrated with "FLIGHT" photographs



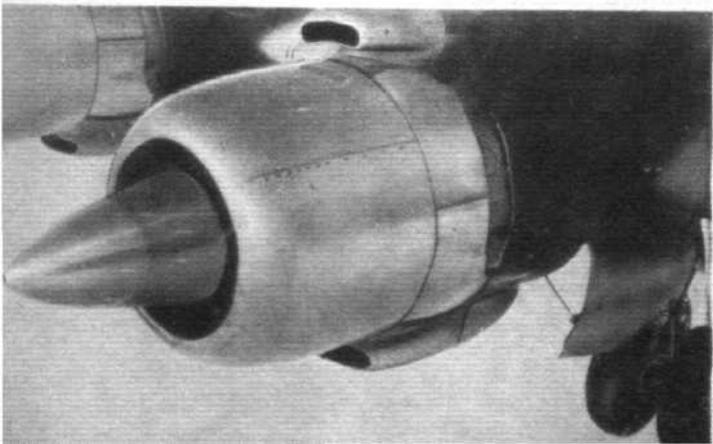
WHEN B.O.A.C. ordered ten DC-7Cs in March 1955, to the accompaniment of sharp Parliamentary bickering, it was the first time that the British overseas flag-carrier had done business direct with Douglas. The subsequent association proved to be a highly satisfactory one. The Corporation has been delighted and refreshed by the smooth completion of the Seven Seas contract, which reaches revenue-earning fulfilment next Sunday, January 6, with the opening of passenger services between London and New York. It has gone on record that the first aircraft, G-AOIA, was handed over by Douglas two days ahead of the date fixed two years before—and that seven aircraft were delivered by the turn of 1956 instead of the five originally promised.

The B.O.A.C. Seven Seas Fleet was formed in June 1955, with Captain M. J. R. Alderson, formerly Comet Fleet manager, in charge. (He has recently been promoted to be B.O.A.C.'s technical manager, flight operations, but will continue for the present as Seven Seas manager.) For the first time the B.O.A.C. crest was nailed up outside an office in the famous Douglas Airlines building at Santa Monica, and the Corporation's representatives, under Mr. Ivor Lusty, moved in to supervise spares provisioning and the usual contractual affairs. Modifications and special equipment were kept to a minimum, and the B.O.A.C. DC-7C is virtually identical to the PanAm aircraft (fully described in *Flight* of July 6, 1956) except for cabin furnishings.

Last summer a team of B.O.A.C. engineers, under Sen. Eng/Off. W. L. Bennett, undertook the appropriate courses at the Douglas and Wright schools. At the same time the Fleet's three senior pilots—Capt. Gordon Store (flight superintendent), E. E. Rodley (flight captain), and Bernard Frost (training captain)—got in some useful preliminary hours at New York La Guardia on PanAm aeroplanes, after a spell on the PanAm simulator at Curtiss-Wright. The main flying training programme, in the course of which six B.O.A.C. instructor pilots were checked out, took place at Palm Springs. This is a quiet airfield about 80 miles from Santa Monica, well clear of the Los Angeles traffic and smog, and an environment as pleasant—operationally and geographically—as the B.O.A.C. crews could have wished for. Douglas provided two test pilots and the necessary ground equipment, and the crews did their circuits and bumps unhampered even by a control tower. Subsequent routine training of the line captains and crews was carried out at Shannon.

The Corporation's Seven Seas will, initially, share with the Stratocruiser Fleet the daily first-class "Monarch" services between London and New York. But in April the Seven Seas will be transferred exclusively to all-tourist and mixed-class work*—including the long awaited service to San Francisco via New York.

*For first-class services 42 "Slumberette" seats are fitted at the luxurious pitch of 54in. A typical mixed layout seats 16 first-class passengers and 33 tourists; the all-tourist version accommodates 77. Colour scheme is to the standard B.O.A.C. pattern—blue chairs and carpets, light grey walls and ceiling, pink candy-striped curtains.



For deceleration at cruising height—a view from the most forward window of the Seven Seas' cabin of the landing gear being extended as a speed-brake.



Ready for departure from Dorval Airport, Montreal, with the inevitable Rolls-Royce-powered T.C.A. North Star in the background.

It might appear curious that B.O.A.C. are not intending to put their newest equipment exclusively on to first-class work; but there is no disputing the fact that the Corporation, because of its serious lack of capacity, has been unable to take advantage of expanding transatlantic tourist traffic, which last year was about 70 per cent of the total. Until now the 26-strong Stratocruiser Fleet alone has been valiantly striving to maintain B.O.A.C.'s share of both first-class and tourist revenue. Because of the old Boeing's great appeal, and the fame of "Monarch" service, B.O.A.C. have held their own in the first-class market—but at the expense of the fast expanding tourist traffic. (B.O.A.C.'s share of U.K./N. American traffic, through shortage of equipment, has declined steadily over the past three years from 40 per cent to its present 25 per cent.)

The pattern for the future therefore appears to make sound sense: Stratocruisers will be concentrated on the luxury first-class "Monarch" flights between London and New York, and Seven Seas—after an initial period of "Monarch" services—will handle the "round-the-houses" tourist and mixed-class schedules linking London, Manchester and Prestwick with Montreal, Chicago, Detroit, Boston and New York. Some Stratocruisers also will be available to operate mixed-class flights to Montreal. When the Britannia 312 begins to take over B.O.A.C.'s first-class transatlantic services, the Stratocruisers may be progressively transferred from "Monarch" to tourist-class work, or put on duties elsewhere on B.O.A.C.'s network.

It seems that the introduction of DC-7Cs in two days' time may well mark a cheering change for the better in B.O.A.C.'s fortunes. These aircraft will offer really competitive standards of transatlantic travel, and will give B.O.A.C. the extra capacity they need to recover their due share of the traffic. The Britannia 312 will, after its introduction, perhaps towards the end of the year, give the Corporation an envied lead until the big jets appear in 1959—by which date the Seven Seas should, according to the British Government's conditions of purchase, all be sold. But our guess is that they will continue in full employment, at least until B.O.A.C.'s 707 fleet is at full strength and, so inexorable is the rising demand for seats, probably for long afterwards. B.O.A.C. can, it seems, look forward to ten or more years of trading across the Atlantic with the best available equipment in the world.

As we discovered when we joined a recent B.O.A.C. proving flight to New York, the comfort of the Seven Seas—the subject of much publicity by its makers and operators—has not been over-sold. Because there tend to be as many opinions as there are