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Parts Greater than the Whole

ASK almost anybody what he thinks about the future of the British aircraft industry and the question is likely to be answered with shrugged shoulders and a wry face. The industry is grossly over-weight and in a shaky condition; it must "return" to some supposed proper size—namely, to its pre-1950 employment level; it must reorganize itself; and all the rest of it.

Acting and reacting upon itself, such talk creates a pall of gloom, ruinous to the morale of the worker at home and the salesman abroad. It forms in effect a great wet blanket; and the pity of it all is that this blanket is tending to obscure a very fine record of achievement.

Ignoring, for the purpose of this editorial, Great Britain's history of designing and building aeroplanes—and it is a commendable history—we can instead point to a number of small design teams in the ancillary industry who have taken on the whole world and have come off anything but second best. We may start with a team which grew from nothing at all, in 1951, in an office of D.H. Propellers, Ltd., at Hatfield. Their task: to develop a turbo-alternator power pack for a guided weapon. The result: a thriving production line of dozens of different pieces of advanced equipment for Bloodhound, Sea Slug, Firestreak and a number of the fastest aeroplanes. An engineer officer of the U.S.A.F. has himself declared: "We have nothing better than these power packs in the States." What he perhaps did not know is that the Hatfield company have never enjoyed more than a small fraction of the manpower and money expended on power systems in America.

Out at Denham, James Martin's little company of Martin-Baker have obtained something approaching a monopoly in the design of ejection seats. His products are sent all over the world—notably to the U.S.A.

The same can be said of Sir Alan Cobham's team down in Dorset: products of their design help an Indian pilot to operate his Hunter or Mystère, just as they allow the pilot of a Crusader or Super Sabre to take on fuel in flight.

Again, going further afield into the British Commonwealth, one can walk down St. Denis Street, in the French part of Montreal, and pass a car showroom belonging to a firm by the name of Jarry. Who could guess that, on one of the upper floors, designers were putting the finishing touches to the hydraulic system of the Avro Arrow? Jarry are a small company by any standards, and their resources are limited. Their decision to accept the challenges posed by the fastest aeroplane in the Commonwealth rested on a realistic assessment of their own ability. They have delivered the goods, and done it for a cost which probably amounts to about two per cent of that spent by the U.S.A.F. Air Research and Development Command on high-temperature hydraulics.

Who was it who said there was no room for the little man?

Watchers Below Ground

FIFTEEN feet underground a Royal Observer Corps member with an R.A.F. pilot's brevet on his blue battledress peers into a dial flickering with simulated gamma rays. Nearby are telephones for reporting nuclear fall-out to the control centre; behind him, four beds tiered into an angle of the whitewashed wall. Above ground sprouts the business end of the radiation detector; near it—like sinister meteorological instruments—are the ground-zero and bomb-power indicators. Iron trap-doors clamp down over the entrance to this underground post, which is called November 1, suggestive of darkness and December. But larks sing on the Surrey hills and in June sunlight the man from the Home Office smoothly intones "... after the Japanese fishermen incident, it was decided that something had better be done about fall-out. . . . About 200 posts have been or are being built underground. . . ." Nearby, in their open-air post, two observers—one a baker, the other a bookseller—plot two Javelins thrusting over from Odiham. The Corps' 15,000-odd all-weather members now have a dual rôle in Britain's defence. They will play it as well as ever—whether the scenery be the sky over Britain or whitewashed walls under the ground.