Riviera Bound Growing apace at Breguet's Biarritz works is the structure of the first SEDAM N.300 90-passenger ACV, right, which is due to appear in October. Plans for a Nice to St Tropez service, using two N.300s and to begin next summer, are detailed opposite. An open-deck freight version of the N.300 is also planned.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

FENLAND TRACK FOR HOVERTRAIN

Work is expected to start within weeks on Britain's first hovertrain test track and an announcement to this effect may have been made by the time this is read. Last Thursday the Great Ouse River Authority approved in principle an NRDC application to lease the 20-mile, ruler-straight strip of fenland lying between the parallel Old Bedford River and Hundred Foot Drain, north of Cambridge. The little-used strip runs north-east from Earith, Hunts, to Denver Sluice, near Downham Market, Norfolk.

The NRDC has applied to lease this land for 21 years and has already made test borings which show that the subsoil can stand the weight of the hovertrack. Everything is being prepared for an immediate start of construction work once the River Authority's agreement is confirmed.

The NRDC decision to back a 250 m.p.h. manned hovertrain research programme was revealed by Air-Cushion Vehicles in May and Mintech approval for the project, expected to cost around £2 million, has since been received. On Tuesday last week the Minister of Technology, Mr Wedgwood Benn, told Mr John Osborn (Con) that he intended to make a hovertrain statement "shortly." This is likely to have been made this week, in phase with an NRDC announcement, and can certainly be expected before Parliament rises for the summer recess on July 27.

Meanwhile, Prof E. R. Laithwaite, inventor of the linear-induction motor with which it proposed that the hovertrain will be propelled, announced last week that after six years he was resigning his appointment as a research consultant to British Rail, and throwing in his lot with hovercraft, in which the linear principle is more likely to find application. Prof Laithwaite said he was disappointed that in six years British Rail had not got very far. Early impetus had been lost. In the USA, where his invention is now being studied, after only one year the Department of Transportation was being urged to build a 2,500 h.p. test motor. Prof Laithwaite will be consultant on propulsion to the hovertrain design team.

Details of the proposed hovertrain programme, and of the NRDC's new subsidiary, Tracked Hovercraft Ltd, which will run it, have appeared in our last two issues.

RN Unit Formed for Falkland Islands

The Royal Navy is to form its first operational hovercraft unit with a civil BHC SR.N6 within the next few weeks. This announcement was made by the MoD last month, just after our June issue closed for press. The unit will comprise two officers and eight ratings, who have already begun training at HMS Daedalus, Lee-on-Solent, to which they will be attached until their operational deployment.

The off-the-shelf craft is to have naval modifications made at the Royal Naval Aircraft Yard, Fleetlands, "to fit the N6 for its primary RN role of a fast, amphibious communications craft capable of acting in support of Royal Marine units," the announcement said. "The craft will not be armed, as it is not envisaged that its role will involve a belligerent use. The SR.N6 will be particularly useful to the Royal Navy in supporting Royal Marine units or detached parties ashore, away from their parent ships."

With the emphasis given in the announcement to Royal Marines, it is fairly evident that the ACV unit will be deployed to the Falkland Islands where for some time there has been a small Royal Marine party stationed with three main objectives in mind. One is to emphasise British sovereignty over the islands in the face of Argentine claims to them; another is to reassure the islanders of British Government support. The third is to counter the occasional depredations of sheep stealers who raid the out-islands from fishing boats.

This last aim has been hindered by the fact that the Royal Marine unit does not, at present, have any mobility other than that provided by the islanders' own boats and the Government Air Services' two DHC Beaver utility aircraft. In this context, it can be seen that RN adoption of the N6 is probably a "one off" decision to meet the particular circumstances in the Falklands, and does not presage immediate naval adoption of more small ACVs. It is evident that the RN awaits delivery of the second