UK AIR TRANSPORT EXPANDS

PASSENGERS, air freight and mail and air transport movements from United Kingdom airports all increased significantly during the fourth quarter of 1972 compared with the corresponding period of 1971. The total output and average load factor of British airlines also rose during the period, according to the latest series of Business Monitors published by the British Government Statistical Service.*

In the fourth quarter of 1972 there were 812 million terminal passengers, an increase of 19·5 per cent over 1971. The London area airports had a marginally smaller increase at 18·75 per cent, but outside London there were relatively large increases at Belfast, Birmingham, East Midlands, Manchester and Newcastle, that at Manchester being the largest numerically. The increase in passengers during the fourth quarter was divided 17·5 per cent to scheduled services and 25 per cent to charter flights, with UK operators having a slightly diminished share of the charter passengers.

December 1972 was the first December in which a million scheduled passengers were carried, showing a 16·5 per cent increase on the corresponding month of 1971. The output of British airlines, measured in capacity short ton miles, during the fourth quarter of 1972 was 16 per cent more than the previous year. Scheduled passengers and non-scheduled passengers were up 17·6 per cent and 20·8 per cent respectively. While BOAC's overall load factor rose from 50·0 per cent to 52·1 per cent, the average for the independents fell from 48·3 per cent to 46·9 per cent.

While 1972 as a whole saw a large increase in the proportion of British exports and imports carried by air, during the last quarter of 1972 total freight handled was up by over 12 per cent, with Heathrow recording an increase of 14·5 per cent.

The total of air transport movements in the last quarter of 1972 was 150,000, over 9 per cent more than in 1971. The statistics illustrate the growing contribution of regional airports (see also page 607) with noticeable increases at Belfast, Birmingham, East Midlands, Manchester and Newcastle. During the fourth quarter, charter flights increased by 22 per cent over 1971 and accounted for 19·2 per cent of all movements, compared with 17·2 per cent in 1971.

* Available from HMSO, London.

VANGUARD CRASH AT BASLE

INVICTA International Vanguard G-AXOP crashed near Basle Mulhouse on April 10, killing 101 passengers and four crew members. The aircraft was on a non-scheduled flight from Bristol Lulsgate carrying 139 passengers and six crew, and it had made two attempts to land in a snowstorm which had reduced visibility to approximately 800m. Basle Mulhouse airport has a 7,775ft main runway equipped with ILS at its northern end. The instrument approach lies along the broad Rhine valley and the obstacle clearance limit quoted on procedure charts is 125ft, indicating an unusual lack of obstructions in the vicinity of the airfield. There are three non-directional beacons associated with the ILS procedure, one on the airfield, one at the outer marker and an additional one at the northern limit of the beacon holding pattern. A further beacon is sited on rising ground near the village of Hochwald, approximately eight miles along the extended centreline of the main runway. Impact occurred near the Hochwald beacon on rising ground.

The Accident Investigation Branch states that the aircraft had initially been cleared into the holding pattern at 5,000ft. It was recleared to descend in the hold to 5,500ft and thence to continue an ILS approach. The pilot advised Basle control that he was overshooting, completed a second approach and again overshot. Communications were good throughout. Contrary to first reports, there had been no indication that the aircraft was diverting to Zurich, and it is thought to have been positioning for a further approach at the time of the accident.

Other reports from Basle indicate that the last radio call from the Vanguard reported it to be crossing the outer marker but the subsequent time to impact, coupled with a statement by the approach radar operator, indicated that the aircraft was not over the locator beacon at the time of the call.

The loss of the Vanguard is the ninth major public-transport accident this year; approximately 579 passengers have been killed in little over three months.

Below, the first 30 production M45H engines for the VFW 614 have been ordered by VFW-Fokker and purchase of long-lead-time items for a further batch of 30 engines has been authorised. According to its latest market analysis, VFW-Fokker expects to sell between 250 and 450 VFW 614s over the next ten to 15 years. While the first production aircraft is scheduled to fly at the end of 1974, the two pre-production aircraft, D-BABB and D-BABC, have already completed nearly 300 flights and explored all the performance limits of the flight envelope.

Below left, a recently released photograph of the Tu-144 production line (see World News item)