

air pictorial

Journal of the Air League

VOLUME 20

NUMBER 10

OCTOBER 1958

editorial

Assistant Editor

EDWARD SHACKLADY

Editorial Office

19 Park Lane, London W1
Telephone: GROsvenor 1530 and 1382

Advertisement Manager

DEREK MERSON
2 Breams Buildings, London EC4
Telephone: HOLborn 5708

Proprietors

AIR LEAGUE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE
Londonderry House,
19 Park Lane, London W1
Telephone: GROsvenor 1530 and 1382

Air Pictorial is published monthly by Rolls House Publishing Co. Ltd., Rolls House, Breams Buildings, London, E.C.4.
Annual subscription £1 2s. 6d. sterling. \$3.50 U.S.A. and Canada.
Single copies post free 1s. 9d. in U.K., 2s. Overseas. 30 cents U.S.A. and Canada.

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

The Fairey Gannet A.E.W.3 will eventually replace the Douglas Skyraider now in service with the Royal Navy. The dimensions of the A.E.W.3 are: span 54 ft. 6 in., length 44 ft. 0 in., height 16 ft. 10 in.

Aquila Airways' decision to cease flying-boat operations, although not entirely unexpected or surprising, is nevertheless a cheerless situation to contemplate, especially for flying-boat enthusiasts, as it virtually involves the abandonment of all flying-boat operations by British military and civil operators. In its hey-day, the flying-boat was a most popular means of air travel largely because of its unrivalled roominess and comfort. But now that the landplane has taken its place and is in universal use throughout the world for air transport purposes, only the most rabid flying-boat enthusiast would take the view that in the present stage of air transport development flying-boats could come into their own again.

However, the more practical and realistic flying-boat enthusiasts still see a rosy future for the flying-boat. They believe, as many of us do, that transport aircraft will tend to become larger in the future and they argue with impressive confidence that at some stage two consequences will ensue. Firstly, when the all-up weight of aircraft begins to exceed, say, 1,000 tons, it should be entirely practicable to strengthen the flying-boat hull so that it will be as seaworthy as a tramp steamer—which would be an advance of transcendent importance. Secondly, financial considerations alone may well preclude any but the richest nations extending or strengthening the runways required for the operation of ultra heavy jet aircraft—and then only at the airports serving their capital cities.

There is much to be said for these contentions, especially when one considers the coming of immense nuclear-powered aircraft which, for safety reasons alone, might best operate from the water; and it would be foolish not to keep a careful watch on the possibilities of development along these lines. At the same time, it seems likely that long before the 1,000-ton aircraft is in sight we shall see revolutionary developments in the field of VTO aircraft, even the largest of which would not require a runway. So far, however, little has been done in this country to develop a truly VTO aircraft. The Air League's Miles Thomas Report last year showed clearly that our manufacturers are confident they can build one and that there are no inherent difficulties in using jets for upward propulsion; but until one is actually built the practical possibilities will remain unknown. We believe that at least one far-seeing air transport organisation in this country would like to place an order for VTO aircraft, but the cost and risk are probably much greater than they could justify. The Air League is convinced it is essential for the Government to play a leading part in financing the development of a VTO aircraft, if this country is not to fall behind in the race for world air supremacy.