



HOVERCRAFT DEVELOPMENT. Finishing touches being given to a model of a projected 100-ton ferry craft, following on the development of the Hovercraft, built in the U. K. by Saunders Roe for the National Research Development Corporation. This model is designed to carry 300 passengers across the English Channel at 100 mph.

Too Much Guidance in U. K.

By Oliver Stewart

A lull in all aviation and missile activity in Britain in the first half of the year, has been widely interpreted as presaging a renewed upsurge as the date of the SBAC show at Farnborough draws near. Two matters are of outstanding importance: The extent and the direction of government financial assistance to the aircraft and aero-engine companies; the determination of a space policy.

Mr. Duncan Sandys, the Minister of Aviation, has said that his officials have been trying to decide which of the projects undertaken by the British aircraft industry "justify" government aid and as I write a statement is expected. It will be seen here that a massive responsibility for the future not only of the British aircraft industry, but for the future of British aviation, now rests with government officials. They, and not the design staffs, pilots and operators, will now settle what kinds of aircraft are to be made in the United Kingdom.

Leading members of the industry, confined by their financial bonds, are not able to speak freely in public on this subject. In private their views are often vigorous.

It has been put to me more than once during the past few weeks that British aviation has been irretrievably

damaged by government action and that all that remains is to hold the burial service.

I personally cannot subscribe to these pessimistic views, although I do feel the industry has now been nationalized in fact if not in name and that a nationalized industry is not well placed to compete in the open markets of the world.

What makes me take a somewhat brighter view than the critics is the fact that several young men who have experience in the industry are planning to set up on their own and to manufacture light aircraft. If they succeed they may well act as a stimulus to the giant consortia formed at the government's behest. I have already reported in these pages that there are signs of the growth of a market in Europe for light aircraft. Perhaps it will give the small new manufacturing companies their opportunity.

Space Policy

Lack of a clear policy on space has been another trouble in Britain. Sir Robert Renwick told the Radar and Electronics Association recently that Britain ought to start immediately on a space program. If it failed to do so, it would suffer "appalling economic consequences."

His opinion is shared by many people and it is safe to predict that

a first class row about neglect of space development will soon break out in Parliament. The scheme of leaving the work to the United States is arousing strong opposition. It is no longer believed that the cost of an effective space research program would be so great as to be beyond Britain's reach. The figure of over \$40,000,000 a year has been named.

An alternative scheme is to try to arrange a co-operative space research program within the British Commonwealth. The Prime Minister's son, Mr. Maurice Macmillan, is one of the Members of Parliament believed to be in favor of some kind of co-operative plan. But again, the final decision will presumably be taken by the Ministry of Aviation. And that Ministry has not so far shown itself to be particularly enterprising.

Defence problems are so closely related to other problems it is difficult to sort out public opinion and classify it. It is certain, however, that in Great Britain there is a feeling that too much has been accorded to United States commercial interests and too little to British. This may be a false interpretation of the situation, but it must be noted that, in England, there are many officers and ex-officers of the Royal Air Force who feel that their service has been undervalued by the missile arrangements.

The Thor sites were set up on the understanding they would be maintained by the Royal Air Force, but that the warheads would remain in United States hands. The RAF enthusiasts say this amounts to a "slighting" of the RAF. Certainly this is too strong a word; but the national reaction must be recognized.

Either there should be full co-operation or no co-operation at all. That is the theory.

Obviously it cannot work in practice. But it is sound as a theory. And it has not always been taken into account in the air defence measures approved by the Government.

Commercially, the advantage rests with the United States and there, again, there is criticism. For the British aircraft industry is not so well placed as to be able to watch its market being absorbed by others without some misgivings.

In view of the world situation, it is of the utmost importance that no government do anything that can lead to bad feelings between the different countries of the alliance. Neither commercial nor any other interests are so important that they warrant acts which may be interpreted as being partial or one-sided.