

# INDIAN SKYWAYS

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My dear John and Pat,

Having read your combined report on the British Aircraft Industry dated December 31st 1954, I wish to thank you for a splendid piece of work performed with clear penmanship and radar reasoning. Before I deal with the subject matter, I wish to inform you that I regard it as a task performed for INDIAN SKYWAYS for which you are entitled to payment, so in the next week or ten days I shall be sending you £20 which will be entirely separate from our monthly payment.

Signals must continue somewhat as they have been coming over, with perhaps a part dealing with anything of news value and interest OUTSIDE the standard handouts sent out by the manufacturers. I receive material from practically every one of the manufacturers, except Avro, Boulton Paul; some are very sketchy and irregular, others supply too much padding so that I find it impossible to give time to find the "meat" - de H and Bristol illustrate well, others seem to have no photographic arrangements. They all lack what I consider good publicity, stories of what is being done with their products in foreign lands. Oh !, except Bristols who ran Air Beef till Anchan and I swore off beef for the rest of our natural. We had at least fifteen copies of the story with pictures, from the day when a beef steak is born to when it is grilled in Simpsons.

I do not want you to act as a collecting box for handouts, I want you to write me a couple of pages twice a month on tit bits of industry news. Even paragraphs about personalities who are of interest should be included, as I can fit them into a review written here. I do not want you to become known as INDIAN SKYWAYS reporter. I will pay £10 per month for this service, for a trial period of three months to see how it pans out.

Now let me try and give you my impressions and conclusions after having read your letter under reply, also other letters from several sources from which I have garnered odd bits of information, all leading towards the same depressing pits of British aeronautical aborting.

It is somewhat difficult to decide where to begin. I agree with you that to publish the facts as we know them and so lay open the cupboard door to disclose the skeletons, would bring down the guillotine on my British advertising, which is income I can hardly discard without facing financial disaster, or having to entirely change of format and quality of my paper, so as to come within the possible income from other sources. This I will not do - but I will not allow the situation to escape attention.

We must deal with it with kid gloves in public, but there are such things as "Confidential Pamphlets" for personal circulation to VIPs within the British Aircraft Industry, or better still letters pointing out that



Mr. &amp; Mrs. John Stroud

January 7th, 1955

this is how we see the picture from Asia, and as we wish to be helpful, will they co-operate to disprove the painting, and show us what is in fact the real situation. They might be grateful for such treatment and show their appreciation by increasing their advertising space bookings. I am slowly learning the editorial art, the Shades of Charles through his letters are helpful at times like these.

The main thing is, can anything be done to bring about a revival of British aeronautical skill and workmanship? Is the patient too far gone? I do not like to think so! I am confident the real fault is to be found in the fountain heads of each manufacturing house. These men with great names were brilliant with wood, a fabric and string, and putt-putt engines with four pots. Each risked his life daily in those days, and they all proved successful until we threw away simple materials and started making 'things' in super light alloys, about which few know anything, and even those who do know, don't really know what they do know.

Having lived a life time within aviation, 1910 to the present day, I have watched with pride the British Aircraft Industry come to life. Shorts and I fancy Blackburns were the only manufacturers then in being in England. To read your letter brings tears of rage to my eyes. To think that this should be permitted to arise is unthinkable. The SBAC is largely to blame, the Secretary General or whatever he calls himself is in my opinion a weak clot. He should be so well informed on foreign aircraft production and methods he should spur the Members of his Society into life, also he should make their position clear to them, warning that unless they pull up their aeronautical socks they will have had it. Nationalisation could not be worse!! why does not the SBAC act as a real sales organisation for the Industry?

It is nothing but an organisation for passing round self congratulatory messages and back slapping at Farnborough. It has become a flying farce. I do not think there is any organised information service within the Industry to warn manufacturers that they are behind competitors?

The habit of talking about four and five years being necessary to design and build a modern aircraft has developed into a vice, so much so that all within the industry believe it. I don't. I refuse to accept the reasons given. If somebody with pots of money set out to design and build a new aircraft, I really believe it could be in production within two years, given the factory and the power plant. But to go on indefinitely prototype flying and redesigning, revising engine after engine and so on, is plain stupidity, it can continue till eventually the finished article never appears at all. That is what is happening today within sight of all of us.

Take Viscounts, according to reports some 170 have been ordered, the local salesman (sic) talks loudly of five a month production, even so my calculations indicate that they will require three years to deliver orders in hand. Viscounts should be coming off a production line one a day. Then operators would buy another 300 because they would know they could have them whilst they were still new and not half obsolete.

The Britannia story is not very convincing. The fact that Bristols have proposed so many changes in the power plant, and have for the



Mr. &amp; Mrs. John Stroud

January 7th, 1955

LR version a power plant still untried, yet they talk about ready 1956/57, does not ring very true. Sir Miles is very correct, you can not fly passengers on promises. To have £50M invested in airliner orders spread over two types, neither of which now seem very ready to use, is a disastrous situation for a national operator. Just suppose the Britannia does not materialise as a LR job by 1957. How will BOAC hold its own against PAA and TWA and AII who will be flying 1449s or DC 7Cs or Ds. May be some Douglas have come to bits, but two wrongs do not make a right.

There are two things essential to the British Aircraft Industry, firstly they must learn to produce top performance types quickly in quantity, secondly they must learn how to sell aircraft. Those that have been bought abroad sold themselves. That is my view. The Government of India recently held an enquiry into the Viscount and the Convair 340, in Delhi to decide if the Viscount proposal to purchase was correct. Convair sent out a team of experts to explain and expound. Vickers having sent Handisyde and one other, ages ago to do some technical sales talk, left it to their local agent, who had to admit he was not qualified to answer the questions, which were obviously inspired by the Convair star technicians.

The British have no real aircraft sales organisations here. de H nobody, except one technical man in Delhi but he has nothing to do with sales. Pompus Percy in Bangalore for the whole Hawker Group, and Maurice "Gravedigger" Elliott for Bristols and Blackburns. Westlands have William Jacks Ltd. non aviation people. There is just no proper handling of the market. Of course as we are at present you may be right, there is nothing to sell so why waste money on a sales organisation or advertising.

I happen to know that the Burmah Shell annual report 1954 on aviation, for London Shell Headquarters contains the most potent protests about the SBAC not maintaining anybody here to keep a watch on the market, and the activities of foreign competitors. This alone in my opinion warranted the expenditure by the SBAC on its world watch dogs.

Now I am told the British Government has withdrawn the Civil Air Adviser to the UK High Commissioner. I always said he was useless, not the appointment. They filled it with RAF WCs, who naturally knew nothing about civil aviation, commercial salesmanship, or industrial life of any kind. Such types are in no position to advise the HC on civil aviation. Secondly, as those appointed had mostly been occupied with the Battle of Britain, they had no knowledge of India, so had no idea what India required in aviation or why. The post as such is sound, but for Gawds sake fill it with somebody who knows something of civil aviation and India.

There seems nothing more I can write at the moment except to remark that if we give the new "News Service" a trial it may help me to understand the position better, and we may discover new ideas for handling it. I shall of course keep you very closely informed confidentially not for publication. I hope in this way we may strengthen INDIAN SKYWAYS position and the link between Mornington Avenue and Juhu. I agree, I wish you could fly out and spend a week with us under the palms in the lovely warm sun, you could even swim whenever you felt too heated. Glad the tea arrived.

contd.



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Regards and best wishes,

R.

PS: Press cuttings most welcome. Whenever any special event occurs if you would buy up Times and Telegraph for me, and send clippings 2nd Class Air Mail, I will be most grateful, debates or questions and answers in H of P are of special interest. Keep an account and I will defray cost.

PPS: I am enclosing copies of letters addressed to a) The Undertaker disguised as aircraft salesman, Maurice, of Bristols and Blackburns; the other b) to Peter King one time PRO SBAC and now conforming and performing to the Bristol drain-pipe trouser corps traditional balooney outpourings. There is nothing new in either but if you read them you will see what line I have taken with these two Bristolians. It may draw reaction but I hardly think anything enlightening will result.