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My dear Maurice,

I must return to your letter dated January 3rd, although I do not feel that I can do it justice by presenting you with an equally well penned epistle. I am sorry to say I find it difficult to understand your interpretation of the several situations you defend. I have three separate sources of independent information in London, all expert in their particular field, and to my consternation combined reading of recent reports has driven me to the conclusion that things are very far from well with the British Aircraft Industry as a whole.

In addition, you must also be aware, very alarming discussions have taken place in the British Houses of Parliament, during which limited disclosures were made about delays in production, whilst the Prime Minister admitted that he was gravely concerned. The delivery figures for fighters show some 40 in RAF service, after three years, is hardly a point to be accepted with pride, especially as it was admitted by the Minister that the foremost RAF fighter replacement, if it overcame its present difficulties, should be up to the Sabre and MiG performance. Somewhat late to catch up with these obsolete types.

Turning to your Britannia affairs, an outsider is forced to take a realistic view. A correspondent who is absolutely reliable and extremely experienced in handling aviation reports from the factual point of view, writes:-

"Both Britannia episodes were to my view a disgrace. I gather the fire in the one lost on the mud was only caused by Pegg relighting an engine in the air after it had failed without knowing the cause of the failure. I am sure any airline pilot worth his pay would have landed with one feathered and had the cause of the failure determined."

The above of course refers to the one on the mud and the up-side-down episode. Neither of these events can be claimed as sound publicity achievements by Bristols, and how such things can occur in a firm of such long experience defeats me. Surely it shows there must be lack of appreciation of modern aviation and aeroplanes.

I am informed that on November 12th the BOAC issued a statement on the Britannia position and the following paragraphs are of vital importance in my opinion:-

contd.

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" BOAC's original contract for 25 Britannia aircraft was signed in July 1949. Since that date, more than five years ago, no individual Britannia aircraft has yet flown pressurized for more than a total of 120 hours. The aggregate test flying time of all Britannias ever built does not exceed 600 hours and the majority of this flying has been done unpressurized."

" Naturally, BOAC in the light of Comet experience, is demanding additional Britannia pressurized test flying."

" Since the Britannia contract was placed five-and-a-half years ago, no material changes in the airframe specification have been requested by BOAC. The Bristol Company has progressively offered alternative engines - first the Proteus II, then the Proteus III, then the Proteus 705, and finally the 755, which is now to be fitted to the second series of Britannias on order. Their proposal to fit another new engine - the BE.25 - is being examined by BOAC. All these engine developments aim at improving the already good specification and BOAC welcomes the proposals."

" The contract delivery dates for the first 25 Britannias were from May 1954, to October, 1955."

" BOAC has already paid £6,640,000 to the Bristol Aeroplane Co. as progress payments."

To my mind that shows remarkable goings on, a sort of blindman's buff to see which engines would go in. The Princesses I gather will never fly on service for want of engines and anyway, even if engines do appear which now seems unlikely, the boats will be either obsolete or corrosion will have done its worst, as I hear it is rampant in the structures, especially the wings. Who was responsible for lack of engines? I was under the impression Bristols were to supply. Everybody is asking, is the same thing going to occur with the Britannia? Can you blame them? The Americans informed me in London at the time of the SBAC Display, that the Britannia was a fine job but there were no engines for the LR model and it seemed it would be a very long time before any would be available.

As for your claim that Bristols have submitted the Britannia fuselage to a voluntary tank test at Farnborough, as if this was some wonderful virtue on the part of Bristols, I think it would have been criminal madness to have put the aircraft into service without such a test. In fact, BOAC after their experience with Comets should have demanded such tests.

You will have noted, "The contract delivery dates for the first 25 Britannias were from May 1954 to October 1955." How do you explain your remark on page 5 of your letter under reply, "The net result as far as BOAC is concerned, is that deliveries of their first aircraft will be some 6 months behind schedule -". We are now in the 8th month of delay and the pressurized tests are still to be carried out and there is no guarantee that modifications will not be required. Furthermore, the flying tests seem to be very far below what one would have expected, and so little pressurized; in fact BOAC demanded additional flying trials. Can you blame them.

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It looks as if all this will take another six months or more which will bring the contract delay to more than a year, as well as throw back the LR Britannia, as obviously that must wait or be delayed to assure all modifications are included. Also, what about this last engine change to the BR.25, and what guarantee is there that that engine will not have a long period of testing before it is airline airworthy? Is it wise to bank on it coming through in a few months?

No airline enjoys being used as a proving ground for manufacturers products, the Comet has proved how disastrous this method of progress is for all concerned. Please do not think that I have no sympathy for de H, or yourselves, I have, but I am trying, after more than forty years in aviation, to apply my mind realistically to the problems we have to face. I fear others do not do this, preferring wishful thinking, with a heavy measure of imagination largely balanced on promises which seldom can be realised.

The BOAC has some £50M invested in Comets and Britannias neither of which can yet be relied on as sure operators on any dates you like to imagine, their entry and re-entry into airline operation is entirely problematical, and as things show at present, the picture does not indicate that an operator can place much reliance in promised delivery or reliable performance/either of these aircraft.

/from

The reports on the Comet inquiry and the displays at the actual sittings, disclose an astounding position existing within the British Aircraft Industry and the various Government concerns connected with it. Nobody seems to know what anybody else is doing in research, the ARB was so hopelessly confused it did not appear to know what it was doing itself. None of this gives the outsider much confidence.

On the engine side, there is the Leonides, an old engine with still 600 hours between overhauls, and a piston change at 400 I gather, whilst the Major version is absolutely untried, not even flown, yet HP and Scottish have hung their two most recent projects on this engine. Exactly what sort of performance would an airline put up with power plants that have to be overhauled every 600 hours or less?

You have seen the Viking spar fatigue, wings come off Marathons, Doves break up, and a dozen other unhappy events. On the salesmanship side the story is no more encouraging. New Zealand has just purchased 100 Agricultural aircraft, the Fletcher FU-24, which the American firm actually designed to the special needs of New Zealand agricultural flying. HRH The Duke of Edinburgh drew attention to this in his Lecture to the Royal Aeronautical Society. I am reporting the lecture in January issue of INDIAN SKYWAYS.

I do not propose to go on, as I could, with gruesome items such as the above, nor do I propose to publish everything I could, as I feel it is time you people in the trade took stock of your positions and did a little co-operation with the Press. If you want support you must keep me informed, not these miserable handouts stuffed with padding and a mass of hopes. I want the inside story and some factual thinking on what is to be the future, not promises, which Sir Miles very rightly points out, are useless, as you can not fly passengers on promises.

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Perhaps the most alarming side of the picture is the extraordinary attitude taken by everybody in the trade, you all go round as if everything was wonderful and you had solved the problems of flight for the next hundred years, whilst everybody else in foreign countries are just goofs, and all American and French products are useless compared with British. Frankly, I am beginning to wonder if some American and French aircraft are not far superior to anything ever built in England.

At least they do go about the job as if they meant it. The Dassault company has built and delivered more than 300 Ouragans, 70 plus to India. Mystere IV is coming along fast in every respect. Has any British manufacturer built and delivered 300 jet fighters in the Ouragan, Mystere IV, Swift, Hunter or Javlin vintage. Meteors and Vampires perhaps but they are out of date ages ago. Let us think in aircraft of today for tomorrow. Can you enlighten me ?

In conclusion, I thank you for your interest, there is much in your letter left unanswered, but I do not wish to become involved in a battle with you. If you think it will be helpful I shall be pleased to call on you by appointment at a time when you can spare time to discuss these things without being constantly disturbed by callers, staff, and telephone. It makes me very angry to be invited to an office for a serious discussion and then have to sit and wait for minutes on end whilst my host talks endlessly on the telephone, or corrects pages of letters brought in by a stenographer. That is the kind of treatment one receives in the British Aircraft Industry and it does not go down well. I do not suggest you would do this to me, but if we are to be helpful to our individual interests I think we should each know where we stand before we start any conversation.

Regards and best wishes,

yours sincerely,

R. Vaughan-Fowler
R. Vaughan-Fowler
Editor.