

Forward looking

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FORWARD LOOKING

Swissair prepares for the "Jumbo Jet"

by MM

This is the time when a number of countries look back on half a century of air transport, including Switzerland. A story of adventure and achievement, in which the Swiss national air transport company Swissair has played a major part of nearly four decades. But Swissair has never been one to rest on its laurels. Though with an increased net profit of £2,641,000 in 1968, there would be reason to sit back with satisfaction. Increased operating capacity enabled the rising costs to be more than made good by £11 million additional revenue last year.

But then, Swissair is not amongst the most efficient airlines for nothing. As is characteristic of many successful Swiss undertakings, the company is usually a step ahead of others. It spends as little time as possible on past achievements, looking forward to new improvements, new possibilities.

Quadrupled Output in 9 Years

Yet in order to fully grasp the constant growth and expansion, we may permit ourselves to review the position at the end of the 'sixties. In 1960, Swissair offered a capacity of 243 million ton-kilometres. For this year, the estimate is 948 million, in other words nearly four times as much as 9 years ago. This compares most favourably with the total gross national product in Switzerland, which has doubled in the same period. It must be remembered, however, that Swissair is not tantamount to the total air traffic in

Switzerland, which also includes the foreign carriers landing in Switzerland — on 1st May, the number of air transport companies using Swiss airports stood at 37. Nevertheless, the development of Swissair may be taken as a yardstick for the increase in Swiss aviation, both for passenger and cargo traffic. The latter is not always noted sufficiently. Let us remember that, at least in terms of value, half the freight volume between Switzerland and U.S.A. is carried by air. Today, approximately 10% of all Swiss exports are transported by plane. In the field of watch exports (a tenth of total Swiss exports), as much as 70% is carried by air. At the Annual General Meeting of Swissair on 25th April, the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Mr. J. F. Gugelmann, gave an example of their DC-8 "Jet Trader" which transported 18.5 tons to New York on 23rd February 1969; nearly 3.5 tons of this was made up of watches (19%).

More Productive Aircraft — Increased Efficiency

How was Swissair able to increase its productivity once again in 1968? Dr. W. Berchtold, President and Managing Director of Swissair, gave the answer to the 858 shareholders attending the AGM: thanks to progressive rationalisation encouraged by more efficient aircraft and the unimpeded growth of air traffic. The short-haul plane DC-9 is twice as fast as the old "Metropolitan" and has twice its

capacity. Inside Europe, demand last year did not quite keep up with the total of available seats, but with increasing air traffic, short-haul services will become profitable again.

The long-distance DC-8 model 62 has helped to improve the economics for long-distance flying. The U.S. Government's appeal to refrain from travelling to Europe has, however, had its unpleasant repercussions. In addition, group travel reductions and other reliefs have reduced the profit margin. Swissair was one of the companies supporting these tariff reductions proposed by IATA, realising that the efficient long-distance aircraft of today will be cheaper to run than their predecessors and more productive only if used to full capacity. The times have gone when the North Atlantic routes were considered the financial backbone of Swissair's whole operation.

The narrowing profit margin of the North Atlantic services was balanced in part by improved results on the South Atlantic lines. The "Coronado" was replaced by the DC-8-62, which allowed an increase of 48% in ton-kilometre production. Once the DC-8-62 is in full service to the Far East and South Africa, there should be favourable development also in these sectors.

New Aircraft Generation

So far as to the past. Special studies in connection with the airports of Zurich, Geneva and Basle, have shown that on an average, passenger air traffic doubles every 5 and cargo traffic trebles every 5 to 6 years. This development is spasmodic, usually due to the introduction of a new aircraft type. In the 'sixties it was the jet plane, in the next decade the high-capacity jet (*Grossraumflugzeug*), the "Jumbo-Jet" will make a decisive impact.

Here already, Swissair has shown its forward-looking attitude by ordering two Boeing 747 some time ago, an order recently changed to the more efficient "model B". Its maiden flight was made on 9th February last, and the two planes should be delivered in spring of 1971. The company also has an option on a further aircraft of this type. Already, comprehensive studies are on foot to find out which of the other new wide-fuselage planes will be most suitable as from 1973/4. These studies are carried out in co-operation with Swissair's partners SAS (Scandinavian airlines) and KLM (Netherlands), a group called KSS. There is no doubt that the Boeing 747 will not remain alone — a whole generation of high-capacity models will be developed.



Swissair is at present using models to study the ground handling problems associated with the Boeing 747B "Jumbo" jets which it has on order. More than 20 vehicles will be involved in the departure of a single Boeing 747B including a 50-ton tractor.

Already last year, a new medium- to long-haul model, the DC-10, a three-engined high-capacity jet (250 to 300 passengers) designed by the McDonnell-Douglas Company was studied, and Lockheed offers a similar type, the L-1011. If the KSS group can agree on a standardised version and an analogous distribution of duties as for the B-747, a solid basis for rational operation of the new kind of aircraft is assured.

500 Passengers take off in One Go

What is the new "Jumbo-Jet" going to look like? Impressive in sight, yes, but the outstanding difference will be the inside of the cabin where 250 to 500 passengers will be seated nine or ten abreast, with two gangways and bulkheads dividing the rows of seats. The cargo hold is also considerably larger than in today's customary jet aircraft. Naturally, a giant aeroplane of this type cannot simply be operated the same way as one of the jets in use at present. There are complex ground handling problems. More than twenty vehicles will be involved in the departure of a Boeing 747, including a 50-ton aircraft tractor. Hangar I at Zurich Airport had to be enlarged and its roof raised by six metres to accommodate "Jumbo".

With the arrival of the wide-fuselage aircraft, airport expansion must keep in step. Airports with their runways, taxiways, hangars, workshops, office blocks, can only be made use of intelligently and profitably if the communication services by road and rail function smoothly. And again, all this will only be used to the full where hotels, conference halls and other facilities are easily available to the air passenger — business man, holiday maker, congress participant, globe trotter.

Is Switzerland ready to cope?

What has to be done to be ready for the increased air traffic? As far as airports go, the main need is that of extending runways. In Geneva, there is only one, though apart from this long-term handicap, the new *Aérogare* opened last year, has put Cointrin ahead, also by being close to the National Road (motorway) network. A new airport building will be ready in Basle to receive the wide-fuselage planes. Zurich-Kloten is being extended further, but it is quite clear that it will not be big enough to cope with the expected step-up in air traffic. A new sector for use of the "Jumbos" is needed, and an additional freight centre is desirable. Kloten, even after the next stage of expansion, will not offer an ideal solution. There is space, though, to develop it further. But opposition exists amongst the inhabitants of near-by villages, and thirteen Communes have recently approached the Zurich Government in this matter. Noise abatement and air pollution are

important problems, too, not forgotten by Swissair by any means (*see article on how Swissair tackles noise in "Swiss Observer" of 12th July 1968 "From Noise to Nausea"*). The high-capacity jets should bring a lessening of noise—fewer starts and landings. Incidentally, the Boeing 747B is guaranteed to be less noisy than the DC-8-62. And news has just come to hand that the American Federal Aviation Office has given the airworthiness certificate to the jet engine which is to be used in the 747B, made by Pratt and Whitney, Hartford (Connecticut). It shows a great improvement: the combustion chamber is of a construction which allows complete burning up of fuel without any trace of residue. The exhaust jet is free from soot and smoke.

No Investment yet in Supersonic Aircraft

Money is the first requisite for all the planned developments. Swissair as a company has to invest huge sums in the future to rise fully to the occasion. The Board's proposals to increase the share capital and to create the pre-conditions for the issue of a convertible bond loan in the near future, were accepted by shareholders. The share capital will be raised from 218,750,000 to 273,437,500 Swiss francs by the issue of 125,000 new registered shares and 31,250 bearer shares. The share capital will be increased further by well over 27 million francs to 300,781,250 francs by issuing 78,125 new bearer shares.

But the Canton of Zurich, too, has to carry its share; it is aware that the economic investment needed secures great advantages for the Canton and ultimately also for the company.

Swissair takes a rather reserved attitude with regard to the supersonic aircraft. In their considered opinion, some of the most important problems of supersonic extent, operating economics and noise are as yet completely unsolved. The Americans have re-shaped their project for the so-called "SST" (Super Sonic Transport) and economics are still not encouraging.

But even without supersonic aircraft, Swissair's fleet can stand comparison with any competitor. The company was established in 1931 and became Switzerland's national carrier in 1947, although it remained a privately controlled enterprise. From its success, it is evident that the company has been run wisely and competently.

Exit the "Grand Old Lady"

On 13th May, one of Swissair's last DC-3 aircraft, affectionately called "Grand Old Lady" by the pilots, was presented to the Swiss Transport Museum in Lucerne where it will have a place of honour after 1971. All DC-3s were withdrawn from line service in autumn 1963, and the HB IRN ("Inda-Romeo-November") then served

as training aircraft of the Swiss Air Transport School. Now she has 24,075 flying hours to her credit, and her log book registers 29,549 landings. With that ceremony one of the most successful aircraft was retired, and an brilliant era came to a close.

The "Jumbo" will introduce a new phase. It will intensify the development of aviation which is one of the most rapidly growing branches of Swiss economy. An enterprise like Swissair whose President is convinced that the best way to serve company and country is to base the costly investment plans on the "field of sober reality" and not to be tempted by "visionary hysteria of progress", can hardly fail to succeed. Astute, but dynamic is its label, shrewdly forward-looking its guiding principle, a combination with every chance of success.

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Since the above article was written, news has come that KLM, SAS, Swissair and the French carrier Union de Transports Aériens (UTA) have in fact selected the McDonnell Douglas DC-10 series 30 as their next generation aircraft. In due course, the four airlines are expected to operate up to 36 of these new wide body trijets, which will be powered by General Electric CF6-50 high-thrust turbofan engines. First deliveries are due to start late in 1972. The cost per aircraft including spares is around £8.3 million.

The DC-10-30 is a three engined wide body aircraft for medium and long-haul services. In the Swissair version it will seat 253 passengers and carry over 15 tons of cargo. The four airlines have agreed on a uniform specification for their trijets. This standardisation permits a division of engineering and maintenance work: it is planned that Swissair will maintain the airframes, while KLM will overhaul the powerplants of all DC-10-30s to be operated by the group. Close co-operation is also planned in both operation and training.

POPE PAUL TRAVELS ON SPECIAL SWISSAIR FLIGHT

For his eleven hour visit to Geneva on 10th June, Pope Paul VI and his suite travelled on a specially converted Convair 990 Coronado jet of Swissair, decorated with the papal coat of arms. The flight from Rome's Fiumicino Airport arrived at Geneva-Cointrin at 9 a.m. For his return on board the same aircraft the Pope left Geneva the same evening.

The Swissair Coronado jet's cabin was specially fitted out and divided into several compartments. The Pope had his own stateroom. The cardinals, archbishops, bishops and other church dignitaries of his suite were seated in a separate compartment, while a third cabin section was, among others, reserved for press, radio and TV representatives accredited to the Vatican.