

Australian Light Aircraft

NEWCOMERS ENTER THE CLUB
AND AGRICULTURAL MARKETS

By Stanley Brogden

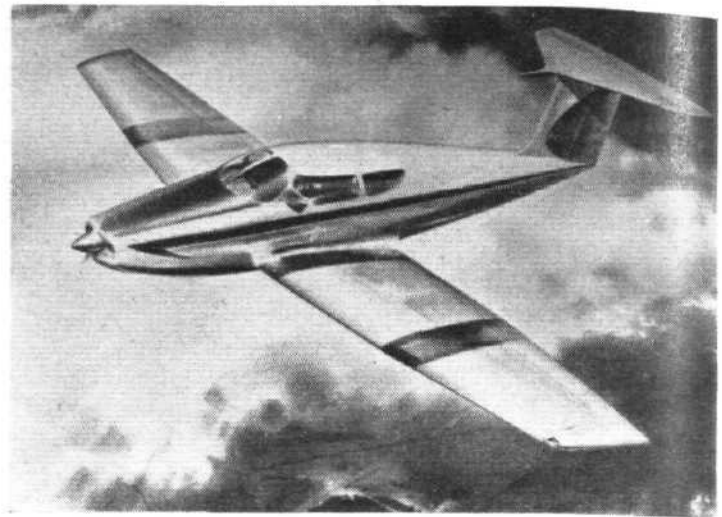
WITH three Cessnas a week being sold in Australia through the very lively Rex Aviation Pty Ltd, of Sydney, and de Havilland really getting going on their Beechcraft sales drive, the Australian light aircraft and business aircraft market is developing very quickly. The Cessna success is such that the American firm is now seriously considering the possibility of production in Australia and a team will visit Sydney shortly to make a survey of the potential.

In Western Australia, a Perth firm new to the aircraft business is considering an approach to Lockheed International for rights to produce the LA-60 in Perth. This aircraft is already arousing great interest in Australia because the rumoured price simply beats anything else in the field.

One wonders why Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation does not go into production with a licensed overseas light aircraft or a local design; the sadly neglected Millicer Air Tourer comes to mind. CAC awaits an RAAF order. It has geared itself entirely to Air Force orders—the Navy has never helped the local industry and, as I have said in a previous article, if there are no Government orders CAC will quietly go out of business. Its future depends on the Government decision whether to buy the new supersonic jet fighter overseas or build it here. CAC has never really got down to the problem of diversification (horrible word), which de Havilland have done successfully here. Attempts to get into the prefabricated-house field were smashed in the 1940s by the unions and the building trade. Some attempt was made in the 1950s, when Air Marshal Sir George Jones was at CAC, to design and get advance orders for a light transport and a small helicopter; but somehow one never gained the impression CAC really meant it.

CAC is now producing the Ceres agricultural aircraft, a redesign of the Wirraway, but the CAC overheads are so great that an unrealistic price has kept sales down. The agricultural operators just won't have it. Big overheads are one of the reasons for the big manufacturers dodging the small-aircraft field—Lockheed just could not produce the LA-60 in the USA on this account.

In Australia it looks very much as if the small-aircraft field will be taken over by newcomers who have no cramping overheads and, moreover, no biases or inhibitions. They will bring an entirely new approach. Most prominent of these newcomers is Victa Consolidated Industries, a Sydney firm which has created a



Artist's impression of one of the newcomers, the Victa R-2

reputation as manufacturers of the mechanized lawnmower. Victa is a very successful and financially lush organization, whose managing-director, M. V. Richardson, started the business in his backyard in 1951 to combine the humble lawnmower and the internal combustion engine. He has made a fortune freeing the Australian married male to give more time to "footy" and the races. His first interest in flying was evinced by purchase of a Cessna 182B and a Colonial Skimmer to get his salesmen around the State.

Victa has the money and it has the plant. The prototype of a high-performance four-seat light aircraft is now being built in the mower factory at Milperra, near the aerodrome at Bankstown. The prototype should fly later this year; deliveries will follow early next year if all goes well with test-flying and a C of A is gained without too many modifications. Powered by a 180 h.p. Lycoming O-360, the Victa R-2 will have a McCauley constant-speed propeller. The prototype will have a retractable tricycle undercarriage but one of the production versions may have a fixed undercarriage for tough bush operation. There will be dual control in the production model, but while the prototype will have two doors the production model will have only one. The R-2 will be a low-wing monoplane, entirely metal, for DCA frowns on any wood in aircraft here.

Victa knew the local requirements were for a cheap aircraft with speed and range; and they hope to sell the R-2 for roughly £A5,500. It will cruise at 174 m.p.h. (5,000ft, 75 per cent power) and have a maximum range at 5,000ft of 740 miles. Control is said to be improved by a high-mounted tail surface, while wing-tips and tailplane tips are raked to reduce vortices. There will be dual control, and full aerobatic capability (two seats occupied) is promised. The production model may be a fully cantilever monoplane, but the prototype has a strut-braced wing. The high strength-factor inherent in the design makes the R-2 a promising design from the Australian standpoint; it is aimed at the grazier and sporting pilot as well as at the businessman.

The R-2 will weigh 1,190lb empty and 2,250lb gross. Wing area is 132 sq ft, span 32ft, aspect ratio 7.7, mean chord 4.13ft, length 21.6ft, tailplane height 8.3ft, and wing loading 17 lb/sq ft. With four seats filled the aircraft will carry 80lb of luggage and 40gal of fuel. Stall is at 56 m.p.h. i.a.s. at sea-level flaps up, 48 m.p.h. flaps down. Ceiling is given as somewhere between 16,600ft and 18,200ft, while maximum climb is 820ft/min. Take-off minimum is 180-200yd, with 370yd to clear 50ft. Landing run, clearing a 50ft obstacle, is given as 190yd.

About five aircraft will be constructed as a pre-production run at the Milperra factory. Then, if orders develop, a new factory will be built to accommodate with a proper production line. Decision on production tooling will be made next year as orders progress.

I understand that Victa have a group of designs, probably four, which could see the prototype stage later on. There is, of course, a crying need for a cheap two-seat sports and training aircraft in Australia.

At present the agricultural market is attracting most of the newcomers. The old firm in this business—Kingsford Smith Aviation Service, at Bankstown, near Sydney—is rather disheartened. Five types of their Cropmaster are in service, the newest version having a 250 h.p. Lycoming O-540 instead of the 170 h.p. Scarab, and a tricycle undercarriage. The PL-7 boom-tail tanker appeared to be a winner in the prototype stage, but it was abandoned through lack of finance to pursue the design problems.

Austerserve Pty Ltd, a subsidiary of Kingsford Smith, are converting Austers. The Autocar has been re-engined with a 180 h.p. Lycoming and with other modifications makes the Bushmaster.

General arrangement of the prototype Victa R-2

