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BRABAZON GIANT PREPARES FOR MAIDEN FLIGHT

At Filton, Bristol, Britain-and-the-world's biggest landplane, the hundred-and-thirty ten Brabazon airliner, prepares for her first trial flight - the climax to five years work by the Bristol Aviation Company. From her birth in the drawing-office to the moment when Chief Test Pilot "Bill" Pegg takes her up, Brabazon will have cost the taxpayer all but six million pounds. This first Brabazon is a prototype only - a flying laboratory, never intended to go into service. But clouding the sense of triumph at her near-completion, are publicly-voiced doubts about her fitness to compete commercially with smaller, less-costly airliners. Her final engine tests are made with the future still a question mark.

The experimental giant is towed to her new hangar where Bristol's chief designer, A.E. Russell, is to supervise the last stages of construction. Any day now, Brabazon will be moving under her own power, ready for taxiing tests. Her thousand foot hangar adds nearly three million pounds to the cost of the Brabazon venture, which, with another two-and-a-quarter millions spent on construction of a special runway, put the total bill at nearly twelve millions. No other hangar in the world is commodious enough to house the giant - a serious headache, when the operational Brabazon II goes into service. Not directly concerned with the plane's future as a passenger transport, is Bill Pegg whose next job will be taking Brabazon down the runway, getting the feel of her controls. Early autumn should see her in the air on her maiden flight.

In Brabazon, Britain has achieved an aeronautical wonder. The facts are staggering. A hundred-and-seventy-seven feet from tail to nose, further than the Wright Brothers' first flight. Wing span, two-thirty feet. At her greatest girth, the size of a London tube tunnel. On a North Atlantic run, she will carry a hundred passengers - twenty more on shorter flights.

The unknown factor in Brabazon's future is the demand for air travel by the time she joins the trans-Atlantic traffic. To be economical, she may be restricted to one or two crossings a week - so losing her pull against more frequent services. Will Brabazon pay her way? Her chief share holders - the tax payers - wish her luck ...