

5/78

12,000 Mile Air Race.

London Airport was the starting point of the 12,000 Mile air race from England to New Zealand. A Viscount was submitted by B.E.A. in the Transport Handicap Section of the Contest. A Hastings was entered by the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Five Canberra jet bombers, three British, and two Australian, were the only entries for the Speed Section of the Marathon Race, the longest ever to be held. Wing Commander Hodges, led the R.A.F. team.

A final check on the aircraft, then it was time for the last-minute gen. The three Ruff crews got their final briefing. Weather conditions were of utmost importance. Among the navigators on the trip was Squadron Leader Currie, flying with Hodges in Canberra Number One. The Duke of Gloucester, who was to start the race, chatted with the crew of the Viscount, before the take-off.

Wing Commander Hodges and Squadron Leader Currie, both of whom served with distinction in the Far East during the war, met the Duke. Wing Commander Guming was one of their Aussie rivals. After a closer look at one of the Canberras, the Duke made his way to the starting line as the Hastings, later the retire owing to engine trouble, taxied out.

The Duke gave the signal, and the first away was the KLM Lifemaster, which as we go to press seems certain of victory. On board were about fifty Dutch emigrants, many of them flying out to marry in New Zealand.

As the Blying Dutchman set course, the Hastings got its take-off signal.

The last of the Transport aircraft was the prop-jet Viscount, which bore the name "Endeavour" after the ship in which Captain Cook discovered New Zealand. Then came the turn of the speed merchants. Later Canberra Number One had to drop out of the race at Perth.

Then Flight Lieutenant Burton took Canberra Number Three into the air. England to New Zealand - a journey of 12,000 miles. From London to Iraq on to Ceylon, the Cocos Islands, Perth and so to Christchurch. There it was officially confirmed that Flight Lieutenant Burton was the winner. Wing Commander Hodges and all his men had written a new chapter in flying history. For if top honours went to Burton and Gannon, his navigator, it was the traditional team-work of the Royal Air Force that had done the trick. And, as a team, the British Canberra crews share in the glorying splendid and gallant achievement.