



A I R C O M M E R C E

Walk-on to Rio

By the Air Transport Editor

ONE of the most endearing things about the Brazilians is that they never boast about, or marvel at, their own achievements. Take for instance Brasilia, which I was fortunate enough to see on a recent brief visit to the country. In conception, design and execution it must surely rank as one of the wonders of modern civilization. Yet the creators of this work of art do not brag about it, or greedily promote it as a tourist attraction. They have built it because—well, because it was not there, as a Brazilian airline man said. They did it for themselves, to adorn their country, to open up a region of vast untapped mineral and agricultural wealth, to fulfil their pride in being Brazilian, and for no other reasons. It has almost bankrupted them, but they have done it. And while it gives them intense satisfaction, it never occurs to them to boast about it.

So it is with Brazilian air transport. I spent nearly all my all-too-brief visit seeing for myself what I had long believed to exist in Brazil—a professional, competitive airline industry which in some important respects may be considered ahead of Europe, and even of the United States. Where else in the world is there a true no-reservations shuttle service carrying 800,000 passengers a year at 15-minute frequency between two great cities? Where else can you take your choice between a jet or a propeller airliner at 30-40 per cent discount? What other country has a national airline which operates an international DC-7C propeller service at fares 40 per cent below those of its own parallel jet services?

All these things, remarkable to me, are just taken for granted in Brazil. Nobody marvels at them; nobody seems to think how clever Brazil is to have done things that others have found difficult, impossible, or just not worthwhile.

It is easier to write off perfectly good propeller aeroplanes than it is to use them in competition with jets. But you do not see dozens of idle propeller airliners lying around Galeão, Santos Dumont, Congonhas, Viracopos, or Brasilia. Everywhere you look there are aeroplanes being loaded or unloaded, taxiing in, taxiing out—Scandias, Convairs, Viscounts, Electras, and jet Caravelles. Every aeroplane and every terminal bustles with life.

I wanted most of all to see and use the Ponte Aérea, the high-frequency shuttle service operated between Rio and São Paulo by Varig, Cruzeiro and VASP. I met Sr Carlos Ivan Siqueira of Varig, who is the Ponte Aérea superintendent, São Paulo. Mr Charles Bourcier, Sikorsky's technical representative in Brazil, and a regular Ponte Aérea customer, was kind enough to act as interpreter.

Ponte Aérea, meaning Air Bridge, is a consortium of three private companies—VASP, Cruzeiro do Sul and Varig—formed for the purpose of operating services between Brazil's two largest cities, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Some 230 miles separate the airports of these two cities, respectively Congonhas and Santos Dumont. The last-named, the old flying-boat base, is a mere two minutes' drive from down-town Rio.

The Ponte Aérea started in August 1960. The names are in the order VASP, Cruzeiro, Varig because when operations began this was their relative ranking in terms of Rio-São Paulo traffic carried, the ratio actually being about 8:6:3. The route has always been Brazil's busiest, and in fact walk-on services were operating before the three competitive companies decided to unite under the banner Ponte Aérea. Competition was extremely fierce, and REAL, taken over in 1961 by Varig, were a particularly aggressive carrier. "You put on a half-hour frequency and we'll put on a flight every 15 minutes" they used to say. Today the dominant carrier is Varig, operating 60 per cent of the capacity offered with VASP providing 30 per cent and Cruzeiro 10 per cent. All revenues are pooled (at the end of each day) in proportion to capacity offered, regardless of load factor.

The published timetable lists about 70 round-trip flights between the hours of 6 a.m. and 11 p.m., an average frequency of one flight every 15 minutes. This could, if there were no other distractions, be checked by sitting on Copacabana beach, over which a steady stream of Convairs, Scandias and Electras seems to shuttle to and fro all day long, approaching or departing from Santos Dumont.

VASP operate Scandias, which they are now replacing with their Viscount 701s bought from BEA. Cruzeiro fly Convair 440s and 240s, and Varig Convair 240s and Electras. Both Varig and VASP use DC-6Bs on occasion.

The published timetable is flexible. On Fridays, for example, there is a mass exodus from São Paulo, when families and business people leave Brazil's major industrial and commercial city for the beaches of Rio. Frequencies then rise to something like one flight every 10 minutes; and at Brazil's traditional carnival time before Lent, or when there is a big game of *futebol* in Rio or São Paulo, the timetable goes by the board and departures and arrivals occur literally every few minutes.

The fare is Crs5,200 single, which at the present exchange rate is about £3, or just over 3d per mile. Return fares are twice single.

"Flight International" photographs

The ticket desk in the Sao Paulo, Congonhas, terminal. See story starting on this page





Within an hour each of these aircraft, parked by the Ponte Aérea passenger gates at Sao Paulo, will be on its way 80 per cent full to Rio de Janeiro "Flight International" photograph

Passengers arrive at the airport, go to the Ponte Aérea desk (see photograph), and buy a ticket. Only rarely do they have to wait for more than an hour, and more often than not they are airborne within 15 minutes or less. Each passenger is given a number, which is called out when his turn to embark arrives. Anything up to a dozen traffic staff are on duty. A passenger can, if he wishes, and without extra charge, make a firm reservation, and he can also specify the aircraft or carrier of his choice. Thus the competitive element is retained, and this aspect is further safeguarded by an agreement that the director of the Ponte Aérea, who at present is Sr Vasco Ortigão de Mello of Cruzeiro, is appointed on an annual rotating basis among the three carriers. The superintendents at Rio and São Paulo are also on a rotating basis. In actual fact, however, the operation has worked so smoothly that no changes in this management have been made since operations began in August 1960. If ever there is any trouble the presidents of the three companies meet to sort it out. A daily bulletin on each company's performance is circulated and this always includes information on flights that are cancelled or delayed. Accounts, too, are settled daily.

The ticket itself is extremely simple, comprising four detachable sections (see photograph). It is as simple as it could possibly be, requiring the minimum of filling in and no carbon copies. Baggage is checked in the normal way, checks being issued to passengers—though the average baggage load is relatively small.

In 1961, the first full year of Ponte Aérea operation, 760,000 passengers were carried. This number increased by 12 per cent to 850,000 in 1962. Annual passenger load factor is around the 80 per cent mark. Load factors recorded in a recent typical week were: Tuesday March 26, 76 per cent; Wednesday March 27, 89 per cent; Thursday March 28, 86 per cent; Friday March 29, 75 per cent; Saturday March 30, 86 per cent; Sunday March 31 (Sunday being usually the quietest day), 51 per cent; Monday April 1, 69 per cent.

The flight itself is a pleasant surprise to anyone who, with a bus journey in São Paulo fresh in the memory, might well be prepared for a rather rough, take-it-or-leave-it service in a much dented, malodorous old aeroplane. In fact, the Varig Convair 240 in which I flew (the one in the photograph) was clean and brightly polished, and the interior (with two-by-two seating for 44) was clean, bright and comfortable. Two smoothly valeted stewards offered, free of charge, a choice of drinks (whisky, martini or fruit juice), fresh

chicken or ham sandwiches, a choice of newspapers, and the usual pre-take-off and pre-landing sweets. Passenger address—like all announcements I heard at Santos Dumont and Congonhas—was in Portuguese only.

So far as Brazilians are concerned the Ponte Aérea may or may not be what it in fact is—the world's first really high-frequency air bus service. It does not really occur to them that this is progressive air transport. The only lead they have followed is their own; the only advice they have taken is from their own experience. Like other things they have done, the Ponte is an amenity they have evolved for themselves to make life better for Brazilians. For the visiting Englishman perhaps the most salutary observation is that the Ponte Aérea is providing work for surplus BEA Viscount 701s. How about a Ponte Aérea between London and Glasgow?

BEA LOSES APPEAL

BEA's appeal against the Air Transport Licensing Board's decision to delete the conditional stop at Bournemouth on British United (CI)'s scheduled service licence between Manchester and Jersey has been refused by the Minister of Aviation on the advice of the appeal commissioner, Sir Ralph Hone. In giving his reasons Sir Ralph says: "The removal of this condition is desirable in the interests of the efficient working of this service by Airlines Jersey (now British United (CI)) and that this consideration outweighs any possible protection that this might afford to BEA's interests, which at the best could only be marginal."

In presenting the grounds of appeal, BEA's representative Mr H. E. Marking, laid great stress on the fact that the compulsory stop at Bournemouth had not been published by Airlines Jersey in their timetable. It was claimed that in effect this deprived BEA of the protection afforded them by the compulsory stop. Mr Marking also directed much of his argument to rebut Airlines Jersey's submission that the stop rendered the service uneconomic.

In defence, BUA(CI) maintained that all the evidence before the Board had established the public demand for more direct services between Manchester and Jersey during the summer months. The BUA representative, J. R. Bayley, mentioned that BEA planned a 15 per cent increase in capacity during 1963 and that last summer the corporation provided about 7,680 seats per month in each direction over the route, compared with the total Airlines Jersey effort of 7,548 seats for the whole period April 1-August 31.

The Ponte Aérea ticket comprises four detachable portions. On the left (removed from this specimen) is the coupon which is used by the airlines for revenue accounting; next is the ticket retained by the passenger; next is the portion given up at the gate; and on the right is the portion retained by the traffic staff at the counter. Validity is 30 days

PONTE AÉREANº 700497 VASP - CRUZEIRO - VARIG BILHETE DE PASSAGEM S. PAULO-RIO-S. PAULO OU RIO-S. PAULO-RIO				Nº 700497 PONTE AÉREA VASP - CRUZEIRO - VARIG TALÃO DE EMBARQUE S. PAULO-RIO OU RIO-S. PAULO				PONTE AÉREANº 700497 VASP - CRUZEIRO - VARIG COUPON DE VOO S. PAULO-RIO OU RIO-S. PAULO			
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