FREIGHTER OR FIGHTER?

If this Bellanca is to remain a strictly commercial plane, military aviation experts are missing a high speed, long range air bet.

JUST as a matter of speculation, if nothing else, let us suppose that the 20 Bellanca 28-90 mailplanes shown here are not actually intended to fly mail. To start with, these commercial versions of the ship James Mollison flew across the Atlantic in October of 1936 were ordered by the national French airline to be used as mailplanes, though it's a little difficult to understand why France suddenly needs high-speed, long range, two-place American aircraft to carry nothing but mail over in France. Nonetheless, that's the story and they're sticking to it.

Now for the speculation. For military purposes this fleet of Bellancas definitely "has something." Figures released by Bellanca show the 28-90 to have a cruising speed at 6,200 feet using 75 per cent of the *Twin Wasp* engine's available 900 h.p., of 250 m.p.h. Top speed at the same altitude with a full load is 280! Now suppose that 1,060 lb. payload were converted to a cargo of bombs and ammunition. Or supposing just plenty of ammunition was carried and the remaining part of the payload was taken up by additional fuel. That gives us a different picture.

With the new Bellanca equipped as, say, a long-range fighter or attack plane, the second member of the ship's crew might be eliminated and his weight (170 lbs.) and 100 lbs. of the payload given over to machine guns and ammunition. The remaining 960 lbs. could be turned over to gasoline. With this imaginary conversion made, the Bellanca 28-90 would have a cruising range of 1,803 miles at a cruising speed of 250 m.p.h.! In addition, the ship has a service ceiling that would give the majority of present-day military aircraft something to shoot at—30,500 feet! And even fully loaded, the 28-90 might even serve as an interceptor fighter, for it can climb 2,173 f.p.m. all the way up to 15,000 ft.! . . .

As previously stated, this latest Bellanca is the up-to-date version of the Mollison trans-Atlantic flight. It also is the latest development of the ship that originally was designed and built by Bellanca for Col. James Fitzmaurice, famed Irish airman. Fitzmaurice, it will be recalled, intended flying this ship in the London-Australia air race.

The 28-90 is a typical rugged Bellanca. Through a novel arrangement of flying and landing wires, a typical Bellanca high-efficiency wing has been used. Wing ribs are closely spaced and the whole wing is fabric covered as is the steel fuselage. The fuselage from engine to rudder is an almost perfect streamline form. All cargo and fuel is carried in the fuselage. Just behind the engine there is a large cargo compartment that could easily be converted to additional gasoline space. Just behind the cargo compartment are the ship's standard fuel tanks that carry 150 gals.

The landing gear is of especially noteworthy design. With an exceptionally wide tread and the added feature of a fixed tail wheel, the 28-90 is unusual in its ground-handling stability. The full retracting gear is operated by a hydraulic mechanism.