

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Dermot Boyle, the C.A.S., in company with Sir George Nelson, chairman of the English Electric Company, surveys the well and truly broken champagne bottle and the brand-new name on the first Lightning. Below, the scene seconds earlier

"Flight" photographs

Champagne for the Mach 2 Fighter

THE LIGHTNING OFFICIALLY NAMED

AT R.A.E. Farnborough last week the English Electric Lightning (two Rolls-Royce Avon) was officially and formally named in traditional style. As the first machine of the type, XA 847, stood in a hangar, its freshly painted name covered by the R.A.F. Ensign, a bottle of champagne poised on a special smashing-rig beside the nose was released against the side by the Chief of the Air Staff. Senior officers of all three Services, and representatives of the three companies most concerned with the weapon system, heard Sir George Nelson, chairman of the English Electric Company, pay tribute to all those who had had a part in development of the Lightning. He said he was honoured that the R.A.F. should have entrusted the design and development of so important a machine to his company. The Lightning would be complementary to the V-bombers in providing the means of preventing war.

Sir George recalled that his company had since the 1930s produced some 5,000 aircraft, including 770 Hampdens, 2,250 Halifaxes, 1,400 Vampires and over 500 of English Electric's own highly successful Canberras. More than 1,400 of these had been produced altogether, including 400 under licence in the U.S.A.

The Lightning project began in the early 1950s, backed by design facilities which included the first privately owned supersonic wind tunnel in this country. The two P.1A research models had completed four years' flying after the first flight on April 4, 1957. This was made by R. P. Beamont, who had been in charge of flight development ever since. The overall responsibility for the design and development of the Lightning has rested with Mr. F. W. Page, the chief engineer of the company's Aircraft Division.

Performance of the Lightning is still secret, but it has been stated that it has flown at speeds of 1,200 m.p.h. Sir George Nelson noted that, with this speed capability, the machine could fly from Farnborough to Paris in some 15 min. Its armament consists of two de Havilland Propellers Firestreak infra-red homing air-to-air missiles which could be exchanged for unguided air-to-air rockets or two 30mm Aden guns. A pair of Aden guns is also carried in fixed mountings beside the cockpit. Automatic weapon delivery is controlled by the Ferranti Airpass radar system coupled with an autopilot.

English Electric state that they can foresee Lightning development and operation for the next ten years. Already the type has proved itself to be equal to or better than anything available elsewhere in the free world and more than 30 pilots have so far flown it. Recently Lt-Col. C. E. Anderson, Chief of Flight Test Operations Division at Edwards A.F.B., and Capt. D. K. Slayton of that division, flew the Lightning at Warton and were warmly enthusiastic about its high acceleration and rate of climb and its inherent stability at all speeds without autostabilization. Further development of the Lightning includes the fitting of larger and more powerful air-to-air guided weapons, for whose equipment



room is already available within the present airframe.

Performing the naming ceremony, Sir Dermot Boyle, the Chief of the Air Staff, said he was delighted that the aircraft now had a name to replace the numerous code-names and symbols by which it had hitherto been known. He paid tribute to Rolls-Royce, Ferranti and de Havilland Propellers for their part in the design. The Lightning would, he said, achieve a genuine Mach 2 with full war load and carry an accurate, effective and reliable missile. In conjunction with the highly efficient British control and warning organization it would provide an effective British contribution to Western defence and form a fitting complement to the V-bombers which had recently acquitted themselves so well in competition with Strategic Air Command in the U.S.A. As he pulled the cord which released the champagne bottle with a loud pop against the fuselage, and the ensign fell away from the newly painted name, the R.A.F. Central Band struck up the R.A.F. march-past outside the hangar.

Shortly afterwards "Bea" took the machine up for a demonstration of a calibre which has come to be associated with his name. Under a low cloud base and in poor visibility he pulled the Lightning into a series of almost unbelievably tight turns and steep climbs. He finally landed with a ground run of little more than 1,000 yd, taxiing in on one engine. He tells us that it is customary to cut No. 1 Avon immediately after touchdown. Both engines at idling power will propel the Lightning along tarmac at a spanking 80 m.p.h.

[Pictorial feature overleaf]

R. P. Beamont prepares for a sizzling demonstration of tight turns after the naming ceremony at Farnborough. At right he is seen with Lt-Col. Anderson, Capt. Slayton and Mr. K. Lush of Edwards A.F.B. after the two U.S.A.F. pilots had themselves flown the Lightning at Warton

