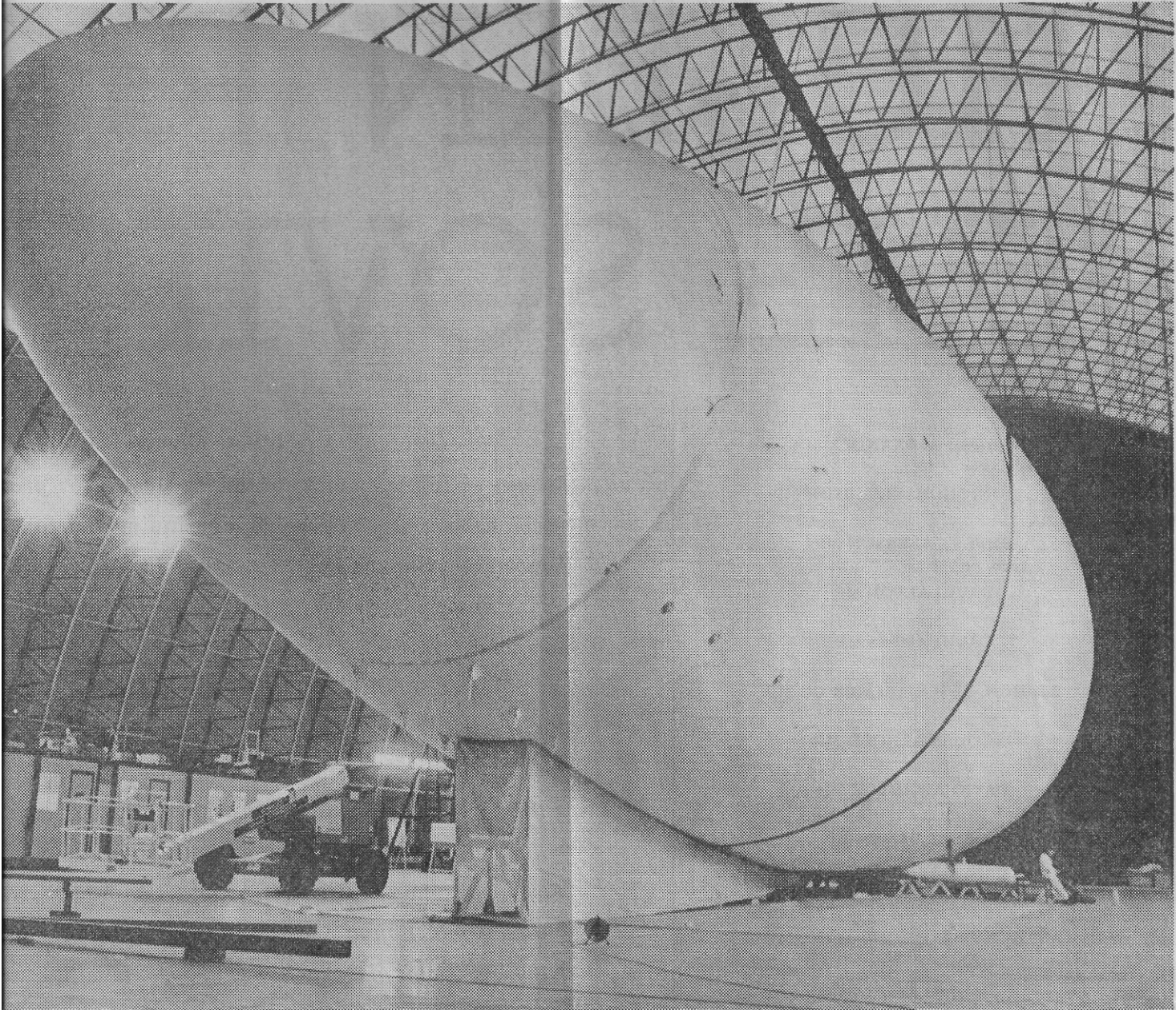


Airship shapes up for its first voyage

STEPHEN MARKESON



By Ronald Faux

A gigantic fabric hangar that rises in passing a grounded airship, this is the first of the new generation of airships being built at Jurby in the Isle of Man.

The Advanced Non-Rigid (ANR) airship is on target for take-off in the spring. The 200ft long lozenge of fabric will carry 30 passengers or four tonnes of cargo at 90mph. The designers forecast a host of

uses from a vantage point for tourists to a platform for police or military radar. Each aircraft will cost about £2.5 million and have a range of up to 2,400 miles. Brigadier John Hooper, managing director of the Advanced Airship Corporation, said there was no shortage of interested customers in Britain, Europe, America and the Middle East.

Airships no longer had the shadow of the R101 or the Hindenberg disasters hanging over them. "People

forget that these aircraft operated regularly for many years between Germany and South America and across the Atlantic without a single life being lost", Brigadier Hooper said. "There was even a shuttle service by airship between Munich and Berlin which was so convenient and popular people used to strap-hang all the way.

"Unfortunately the concept was ahead of the technology and we all know what happens when hydrogen catches fire. Now technology is far

ahead of the concept and airships are extremely safe", he said.

The aircraft is powered by twin turbo-prop engines and has bow thrusters that assist manoeuvring at ground level.

Modern materials and ingenious design gives the airship strength and agility that the pioneers would have envied. "We are absolutely confident that at a push it would loop the loop — but not with me on board", the brigadier added.