

Oldest customer gets prompt service

The airline's oldest customer is a very frequent flyer and gets V.I.P. treatment. Although they don't occupy the spacious seats in the First Class cabin, the billions of pieces of mail that travel every year in the bellies of the Air Canada fleet go ahead of both baggage and passengers. In fact, the only items that are boarded ahead of priority mail are minimum fuel, AOG (Aircraft on Ground) stores and emergency shipments of medical supplies.

"Trans-Canada Air Lines was established to carry the mail. Passengers, it was hoped, would be forthcoming, but there was some question about that," reads the opening statement of 'It seems like only yesterday', the chronicle of Air Canada's first 50 years.

The long-standing business relationship with the Canada Post Corporation is of vital importance to the Cargo Branch. "Canada Post is and always has been Express Air Canada's largest customer," says Bernie Miller, Vice President, Cargo. "Last year close to 39 million kilos, representing seven billion pieces of mail, moved through our network, contributing



The Curtiss HS-2L was used to establish Canada's first regularly scheduled air mail service back in 1924. The plane now resides at the Canadian Aviation Museum in Ottawa.

\$56.2 million to the corporate coffers," he adds.

From the early days the revenue derived from the carriage of mail has been a prime motivating factor behind the development of commercial aviation world-wide. Air mail was carried between London and Paris as early as 1919 and by 1925 the United States had a full-fledged transcontinental air mail service.

The first Canadian experi-

ment in transporting mail by air was conducted in 1918 between Toronto and Montreal and by 1924 mail was carried regularly on flights serving the mining communities of Haileybury, Ontario and Rouyn, Quebec. In 1927 the Post Office allocated a budget of \$75,000 to inaugurate a regular air mail service. And they have never looked back. Today, that budget is close to \$80 million.

In geographical terms, the

Canadian postal system is one of the largest in the world. It reaches into every inhabited area of the nation, from remote fishing villages to isolated communities in the high Arctic. It operates more than 8,000 offices and employs more than 60,000 people.

On October 16, 1981 the Post Office became Canada Post Corporation, a complex blend of business and public service whose mandate is to carry the

mail and turn a profit.

To do this Canada Post must offer reliable service and, like the airline, one of its top priorities is on-time performance. When a freighter is delayed so is its contents.

"We have recognized that a number of handling improvements could be made, especially at the all-important Toronto hub," says Dave Wirsing, Director, Pricing Tariffs and Customer Contracts, who acts as a liaison between the Cargo Branch and Canada Post Corp.

During the past few months a number of steps have been taken to streamline the process. A group of cargo employees monitor the movement of mail through Toronto and the liaison between Air Canada and Canada Post has been strengthened so that any irregularities can be dealt with more effectively.

"So far these steps are producing the desired results," reports Wirsing. "We have the freighters, the staff and the network to move the mail and we cannot afford to let our most important customer down," he says.