



Tullamarine: slender threads

The shanty town at Tullamarine

ROBIN B. . . . looks at Sydney's and Melbourne's new air terminals

SYDNEY'S AND MELBOURNE'S new airport terminals were, as everyone knows, fraternal twins, born about a year ago to the Department of Civil Aviation after an elephantine gestation period.

No one would argue that Sydney did not need a new terminal. It is characteristically Australian that we put the worst foot forward in welcoming visitors. No cooking-up of fancy first impressions for us — that we can leave to the banana republics. Sydney's hot wooden sheds, painted up in their bright contemporary colors, welcomed thousands of celebrities to Australia; and none of them ever complained, did they?

However, in its wisdom, the Department of Civil Aviation ordered a new terminal for Sydney and a whole new airport for Melbourne. Both have served only overseas flights and Sunday family outings for about a year, but during the past fortnight Australia's domestic airlines also switched, screaming with protest at the cost, to Melbourne's new airport, Tullamarine.

— To Melbourne the new terminal building is much more than just a better shed. To one of the most truly isolated cities of its size in the whole world, the neat electronically controlled signs announcing arrivals

from London via USA, departures to Belgrade via Dar or Malta via Sing, spin out more than an aura of Peter Stuyvesantian glamor to a Sunday afternoon family group. They spin also a slender thread that seems to attach Melbourne to the world again for the first time since the last streamer broke at the end of the great age of the liners.

Yet although it is satisfying that the two new terminals should make pleasant Sunday family viewing — as well as the planes they have bright color and nice pieces of art — they do have another purpose, which is to receive and dispatch efficiently Australians and others intent on travelling somewhere. What sort of first impression do they make on visitors from abroad?

The answer — so far as I have been able to judge from speaking to visitors from the outer world immediately on their arrival at one or the other — is absolutely none. If you tell the arriver (but it is wiser not to) that the terminal is new, he may look around and express mild surprise, but that is all. The truth is that both terminals were born 10 to 15 years after their time. They are indistinguishable from any ordinary international terminals built anywhere in the early 1960s.

That probably sounds as if it is

intended to be rude to the Department of Works' designers of the two buildings, but it is certainly not so intended. The fact is that they actually were designed years ago, but they remained on the drawing boards while the political and bureaucratic machine worked up sufficient steam to get them started.

As a result, the two cities' international terminals, when they opened last year, had many of the facilities long familiar to travellers, but no new ones, and they looked not obsolete so much as forgettable.

There was probably only one significant item that could be called a positive error. The DCA evidently considered that air-conditioning was a new-fangled gimmick and an unjustifiable expense. As a result both buildings were ovens in the hotter days of last summer. This is a factor which will distinguish them for half of each year from all other international terminals of recent times. (The restaurants and bars are air-conditioned; but all the potentially hot-tempered business side is only heated, not cooled.) However, all that is practically history; it is more relevant to consider what is happening now.

Tullamarine was built on one of the most beautiful sites of any met-

ropolitan airport anywhere. A very fine new \$30 million freeway carries you only 13 miles from Melbourne to a great flat valley surrounded by low hills sprinkled with Fred Williams trees. The impact made on this landscape by the huge terminal building, and that building's qualities as architecture, are growing less and less relevant as a collection of ancillary buildings grows up around it.

The site was similar, in its own distinctively Australian way, to the superb park-like sites of Dulles airport near Washington, or the Kuala Lumpur airport. In each of those cases (the latter owing a lot to the former) the terminal building stands alone on manicured lawns.

No doubt such purity would have been much more difficult to maintain under Tullamarine's busier conditions, yet already there is an extraordinary growth of completely unordered supplementary structures around the main building. They range from a big, presentable motel of American design to little metal sheds. There are bricks of every shade from white through many flavors of oatmeal to chocolate, and lots of other materials besides. There are roofs of many shapes from flat to gable to W-shape. All these interesting things are used to make up an unrelated village of freight stores, customs' storage rooms, petrol stations, a "space centre" exhibition hall, a shopping mall, and many sheds housing various technical accessories to the airport's function — all surrounded, like salad in aspic, by car-parking.

It is already a shanty-town and it is clearly going to get worse. All kinds of light industry are drawn to an airport. They will be permitted, it seems, to crowd around Tullamarine, until its environment will be as great a shambles as the mess left behind at Essendon. And that is how Australia's first completely new international airport will greet visitors.

The Bosch electronic petrol injection system represents a giant step