General Electric in America to its catalogue, giving a broad base of supply.

Honeywell is a relative newcomer to Britain, but has been expanding at roughly 40 per cent a year. It is, however, weak on services, having only just opened its first time-sharing bureau in Slough. The merger will bring to Honeywell considerable software knowhow. The sales side of the combine will be structured to form two divisions: an information services division handling time-sharing, commercial education, contract programming and other bureau activities, and an equipment division selling all ranges of hardware and data entry devices, and sticking to the all-in or "bundled" pricing policy.

In Britain the disparity in size and function of the two subsidiaries will simplify the creation of Honeywell Information Systems Ltd. Sister companies in Europe will have rather more difficulty in unifying. Honeywell and General Electric are nearly the same size in some countries and are competing strongly with one another, particularly in West Germany. The impact of their eventual merger will be correspondingly greater than in Britain. One can expect some confusion initially by analogy with the English Electric-ICT merger which is even now bedevilled by the problems of incompatibility of the two systems. In fact, incompatibility within Honeywell-GE systems may lose some of Honeywell's new-found customers. Mr G. Bosnan, managing director of HIS Ltd, feels, however, that it will not take too long to develop a wide range of compatibility or peripheral devices, and he believes that "the software compatibility problem is eased to the extent that higher level languages are used".

The new combine, the third biggest computer concern in Britain, will provide some competition for ICL. Its share of the market will go up to about 10 per cent, well behind ICL and IBM with about 40 per cent each. It is expected to become particularly important in the commercial software services field for which there is an obvious need. It will also be competitive with IBM, and may even assist in reducing the IBM dominance of the international computer market. Yet the broad range of supplies and services offered by the new company makes it vulnerable. It could be too thinly spread for its size, requiring impossible investments over a wide area, and it may be unable to offer the best specialist services which could be provided by smaller concerns.

SPACE RESEARCH

Skylark Rejuvenated

by a Correspondent

BRITAIN'S space experiment work-horse, the Skylark sounding rocket, has achieved a new lease of life through the development of a low-cost, packageable launcher system. Curiously this has been developed by West German interests, forced into exceptional solutions by having no suitable rocket range on their own territory. Essentially, the system comprises a single rail guide, mounted on four legs set 90° apart supported by a concrete pad. Skylark is launched from the rail itself which has a range in elevation of minus 5° to plus 100°.

The system has proved substantially cheaper than the permanent installations and it is also more flexible. It is claimed to be able to launch sounding rockets not exclusively limited to Skylark for research programmes

Skylark being launched from the MAN launcher at the Andoya range, Norway.

"at any geographical location with minimum site preparation". It is fully compatible with Britain's other two chief research rockets, the smaller Petrel and Skua, which are fired from tubes and can also be mounted on the adjustably pointed rail.

The British Aircraft Corporation, makers of the Skylark, have recently entered into an agreement with DFVLR of Munich, sponsors of the launcher developed by MAN, to market Skylark using this launch system. The new export sales scheme promoted by BAC also includes the other British sounding rockets which are made by Bristol Aerojet.

ENGINEERING

Fluids at the Fore

from our Special Correspondent

East Kilbride, Scotland

HOPES are again alive at the National Engineering Laboratory here for the use of hydrostatic transmission in ordinary motor vehicles. Trials with a BMC Mini seem to have confirmed that a fluid drive to all four wheels gives quieter and more efficient performance, although reliability and cost are still in doubt. Visitors to the open days last week may have caught a glimpse of a hydrostatically driven Mini leaving a conventional Mini stranded at the post on a stiff climb up a greasy road surface.

One of the newer services which the NEL is offering to industry is what is called the Metrology Club of Scotland, through which Scottish companies may use the £300,000 worth of precision measuring equipment at the NEL for a fee of £150 a year. The NEL runs a wide range of test facilities for industry, among which is laboratory simulation of road conditions for testing