

NN Apr 97

## Nuclear technology still strains credibility

'INCREDIBLE. . . ' That was the reaction of one reporter invited to the Ministry of Defence to hear about the Navy's new class of nuclear submarines – which will never need refuelling in the course of their entire lifespan.

The rest of his colleagues – most of them seasoned defence correspondents – had taken the news with equanimity. One or two were seen to stifle a yawn. But his pardonably ingenuous remark seemed to wake everyone up.

As one, the panel of experts turned to him in surprise and gratitude. Well, yes – it *is* incredible, they agreed.

It is 40 years ago this month that the Queen approved the name HMS Dreadnought for the first British nuclear boat. But it is easy to lose touch with the fact that the awesome power of the Navy's nuclear submarine force is still little understood by the people whose taxes pay for it.