

Air Nostrum is top regional airline

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Notwithstanding frequent appearances of Disney characters around the conference and exhibition site, the highlight of the European Regional Airlines? Association annual general meeting at Disneyland Paris was undoubtedly the award of the European regional airline of the year award.

For 1999-2000, this accolade went to Air Nostrum, the Iberia regional carrier. Carlos Bertomeu, its CEO, was presented with the prestigious award during the closing session of the AGM.

Formed as recently as 1994, the Spanish operator has a mixed fleet of 22 Fokker 50s, four ATR72-500s and five CRJ-200ER aircraft. It expects to carry two million passengers next year with a planned fleet of 45 aircraft. To reach this number, aircraft deliveries will involve 12 more Fokker 50s, and one additional ATR72 and CRJ.

ATR

THE ATR 72-500 entered service in the past two months with two significant customers ? Air New Zealand and Jet Airways of India.

Just before the European Regional Airlines? Association annual general meeting, ATR had announced that its asset management group had placed the seven Air New Zealand ATR72-210s, which are being replaced by newer -500 models, with Atlantic Southeast Airlines, the Delta Connection subsidiary, bringing that carrier?s fleet to 19 ATRs.

As at mid-October, new ATR deliveries totalled 580 aircraft ? 347 ATR42s and 233 ATR 72s. Total orders were 357 and 250, leaving a delivery backlog of 10 ATR 42s and 17 ATR 72s.

Avro RJ ?launched? at ERA

Without actually saying that it hadlaunched the re-engined Avro RJ-X, British Aerospace Regional Aircraft effectively did so at the European Regional Airlines? (ERA) Association annual general meeting by announcing the programme to build two RJ aircraft, line numbers 376 and 378, as the first RJX-85 and RJX-100, respectively.

According to Jeff Marsh, Avro?s SVP sales and marketing, the RJX-85 and -100 positions could easily be reversed if customer demand drives earlier deliveries for the -100. The first of these two aircraft is due on the Woodford assembly line in April 2000, and will receive its AS-977 integrated powerplant system (IPPS) shortly after in July.

The IPPS comprises the nacelle, engines and engine systems being developed jointly by AlliedSignal, GKN Westland and British Aerospace Regional Aircraft. Tunnel testing ?to verify the forecast performance characteristics of the new powerplant system/wing interface?, should be complete as Aircraft Economics went to press, to be followed by systems integration and pylon structural testing early next year. The flight test phase will take eight months and will be ready for certification and first service by July 2001.

While no orders for the new model were announced, unofficial reports suggest that Avro is close to securing launch orders for the aircraft by the end of this year or early in 2000.

Avro has received modest orders for its existing models. Aegean Airlines ordered its fourth RJ100 for delivery in December. Aegean has also taken over Air Greece, the Greek regional, and is likely to order one or more further RJ100s to replace the ailing regional?s Fokker 100s.

Aegean commenced operation with its first two RJ100s in April and, according to Theodore Vassilakis, its CEO, ?passenger response has been extremely positive, with each aircraft executing 78 weekly sectors?.

He added: ?The smooth introduction to service, strong market demand and high passenger appeal prompted us to commit so soon to additional units of this fine aircraft.?

CityFlyer Express ordered two more for a total of 10 orders and optioned an eleventh. Aircraft six and seven were delivered in July and August.

Speaking at the ERA meeting, Brad Burgess, CityFlyer?s MD, said: ?The RJ100 has played a key role in enabling us to develop our network. As

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we prepare for the future as a 100% British Airways-owned company, we are pleased to be offering our passengers more jet service and a wider choice of destinations. He added, "It's likely that we'll be looking at further fleet increases over the next 12 to 18 months."

During the ERA meeting, CityFlyer was still awaiting the outcome of the UK government's deliberations on its planned acquisition by British Airways. The extraordinary bureaucratic process, which has lasted almost a year, was finally completed October 28, when Stephen Byers, the UK trade secretary, accepted BA's undertaking to limit the combined airlines' take-up of runway slots at London Gatwick to 65% in any one hour and 60% in any two-hour period until 2004.

The two CityFlyer orders bring the Avro RJ orderbook to 152 aircraft. These numbers are additional to total sales of 219 earlier-model BAe 146 aircraft.

Bombardier

Bombardier (see range review, this issue) announced it was to increase its combined CRJ production rates for the second time in less than a year. Production is to be stepped up from 7.5 aircraft a month to 9.5 by next summer. The company reported that it had already taken 135 firm orders this year.

The Canadian conglomerate again surprised the assembled masses at the EVA meeting by revealing it is studying a CRJ-900 further stretch of the CRJ-700, retaining that model's interior cross-section and CF34-8 series engines as its contender in the 90-seat stakes. Delivery could be early 2002, two years ahead of any all-new BRJ-X. If proceeded with, this would mean that the smallest potential model of the five-abreast BRJ-X would be a 110-seater (BRJ-X-110) with the potential to stretch to 130 seats (BRJ-X-130), putting it head to head with Boeing's 737 ranges and the 717-200.

Embraer

Embraer threw its hat in the ring to fill what was a not very obvious gap in its range, by announcing the production of the ERJ-140. Midway in size between the 37-seat ERJ-135 and 50-seat ERJ-145, the 44-seat ERJ-140 represents either a 2.3-metre stretch of the -135 or a 2.14-metre shrink of the -145.

Conveniently ignoring the existence of the mid-1970s Fokker VFW614 design, Mauricio Botelho, Embraer's ebullient president and CEO, said "the ERJ-140 will be the first 44-seat regional jet aircraft introduced in the market, enhancing our competitive edge and offering a wider product range to fulfil customer needs".

The new model is planned to be certified and available in the first quarter of 2001 at about \$15.2 million. Embraer sees a market for 750 aircraft of this size over 10 years. The new investment required is said by Embraer to be \$45 million.

Aircraft Economics confidently expects to see a 40-seat ERJ-137 announced at November's Dubai Air Show and a 47-seat ERJ-143 launched at Singapore's Asian Aerospace show next February.

Embraer also released details of its second tier of suppliers for the ERJ-170/-190, after earlier selection of Honeywell and GE as prime avionics and powerplant suppliers, respectively. These include Hamilton Sundstrand for the APU, electrical power and air systems, Parker for the flight controls, fuel system and hydraulics, Gamesa for the rear fuselage and empennage, Kawasaki and Sonaca for wing and pylon components, Latecoere for fuselage centre I and III sections and Liebherr for the landing gear.

Embraer retains the cockpit and wing/fuselage section and overall control of the wing design and construction.

Fairchild Aerospace

With the large Lufthansa order under its belt, Fairchild concentrated at the ERA meeting on moves aimed at beefing up its sales and support infrastructure and securing industrial manufacturing support for its 428 JET.

Dan Stone was appointed VP maintenance and field support, while Robert Loehfelm became VP marketing at the head of a new integrated marketing organization. Rene Gsponer was made director of high-wing customer support, covering the 228/328/428 families.

During the ERA meeting Fairchild delivered its first 328 JET to a European customer, Tyrolean Jet Service, following earlier deliveries to Ozark Airlines, Shell Petroleum, Skyway Airlines.

Also in Paris, Fairchild signed, on September 30, the expected agreement with Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI) for the Israeli group to design and fabricate the fuselage and perform final structural assembly of "green" aircraft for its 44-seat regional jetliner.

Jim Robinson, the Fairchild president, said: "This alliance with Israel Aircraft will allow us to bring the 428 JET to market a year earlier than originally planned." He added: "Fairchild's relationship with IAI on the 428 JET is a strategy that enables us to expand our product line simultaneously into the 44-seat category while not disturbing the 328 JET programme."

Fairchild is also expected within one month to select its equity partner, rather than resort to the bond market for the finances it requires to complete its new programme funding, said Robinson. He added: "We need to bring in about \$300 million to give us the ability to tap into guaranteed loans from the German government, in compliance with WTO programmes."

A previously unannounced deal for two Dornier 328 aircraft, serial numbers 3109 and 3110, from the combined 328/328 JET production line are to be delivered to Air Marshall islands, one in November and the other about March/April next year.

Also, Fairchild announced on October 18 an order for one 328 JET from lessor Locat for delivery in April 2000 to Air Vallee, the Italian regional. This brings total Fairchild regional jet commitments to 420 aircraft.

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