

Private Flying



By Tony Smith

EUROPEAN LINK

NEW MARKETING SCHEME ASSESSED: DIPLOMATE AND MONSUN IN FLIGHT

INITIAL STEPS IN THE MARKETING LINK-UP between Socata and Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm (see *Flight* for July 16, page 78) were taken recently when the Diplomate and the Monsun visited the UK for the first time. Some of the details on the extent of the agreement do not appear to have been finalised but basically the idea is that, in the UK, Air Touring Services of Biggin Hill should market the Bo209 Monsun as well as the full Socata range, as at present. The name Bölkow is to be dropped and Messerschmitt used instead. In France, Socata dealers, already agents there for the Islander, will also market the German aircraft. In both cases, the Monsun virtually becomes part of the Socata range since all payments for this aircraft will go through Socata.

MBB has dropped production of the Bo208 Junior, claiming that this was partly due to difficulty in obtaining the 130 h.p. Rolls-Royce Continental O-240 in sufficiently small numbers. While the 100 h.p. unit was adequate for many European countries, export versions needed the extra power. This leaves the Monsun as the only light aircraft made by MBB. The consortium's motives in linking with Socata are probably twofold. First, the agreement provides MBB with an entry into the notoriously "closed-shop" French market and, through the British Socata agent, into the UK market which it has not fully exploited to date. Secondly, the Monsun becomes part of a range—an important requirement for this class of aircraft as has been shown by the American industry, and more notably by Beagle. To ensure an adequate and efficient distribution network, it is essential for dealers to be able to stock a range of types so that they have sufficient scope within the entire market.

That the agreement centres solely on marketing is emphasised by the fact that MBB will do its own selling in Germany where its dealer network is understandably very good. In the two countries where the agreement applies at present the

merging of the two makes of aircraft appears to be complete since Socata would be content for Monsuns to be taken by its distributors instead of, say, Rallye Clubs. Also, some minor Rallye components are to be used on the Monsun.

Socata, for its part, could not previously offer a spinnable aircraft. In most European countries, where the requirement for spinning in the PPL test has been dropped, this did not matter too much. To expand in the British market, however, a spinnable aircraft was essential in the range offered. Also, emphasis on fully aerobatic capability is growing and there are still relatively few types available which fit the basic trainer/aerobatic trainer/tourer requirement. Chief rival to the Monsun in this country would seem to be the AESL Airtourer. Herr Helmut Taschinski, MBB sales manager, told me during his visit last week that low production of the Airtourer would prevent it becoming a threat but he appeared to overlook the fact that Trojan, the new UK licensee, intends to produce at a rate of 100 to 150 a year by late 1971 or early 1972.

Socata is certainly in a good marketing position now with aircraft ranging from the small Rallye Club to the advanced Diplomate and Rallye 7—which is expected to be fully certificated by the next Paris Show. The gap existing between the advanced singles and the primarily third-level Islander may be filled if Partenavia joins the consortium with the P.68.

Officials from Piper have recently been talking to Socata and MBB representatives. The American company has virtually closed down production until September and could well be seeking a wider outlet in Europe. If anything comes of this

Heading picture, the Diplomate showing its landing-gear operation; below, same situation, different angle. Worthy of note is the large fin area and also the ventral fin—two features which provide the Diplomate's outstanding directional stability

