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Eastern course eliminates the lessons on airliner tech-nology, transonic aerodynamics and high-altitude meteor-ology, and takes 31 days compared with the standard 38. Eastern has ordered an A300 simulator from LMT, with an option to cancel which expires by May 1, and is also buying a cockpit procedures trainer (CPT) from Aero-spatiale. If the purchase goes ahead, the unit should be delivered about the end of 1979.

Eastern has not yet decided on the visual system to be used on its first A300 simulator or on the second simulator which it will buy if the A300 enters permanent service. The airline has bypassed the rigid-map visual generation, and currently uses McDonnell Douglas Vital III on its TriStar simulator. Technology is now advancing so fast, however, that Eastern is cautious about placing a prema-ture order lest a new and better system become available. Vital IV and the Redifon Daynite are currently under consideration.

Airbus is relying on the Airbus Support Division (ASD) base at Hamburg to keep the Eastern aircraft moving for the duration of the trial operation. Eastern "has a slightly, but not vastly greater stock of spares than normal," ASD tells Flight. The Hamburg support centre claims a dispatch time of 4hr for components requested on an AOG (air-craft on ground) call, and 24hr for "emergencies". In any case, the engines and! much of the A300 avionics are US-supplied. Airbus will establish a "mini-Hamburg," quite possibly at Miami, if Eastern buys the aeroplane.

Eastern operations room
Airbus technical representatives will work in co* operation with Eastern's engineering staff and the airline's Miami operations centre. The last-named is a concept introduced by Eastern in 1968, so the superficial similarity to Houston Mission Control must be coincidental.

The Operations Centre is an impressive tool for maxi-mising utilisation and reliability. The guiding principle is that day-to-day, hour-to-hour responsibility for the airline's operations is vested not in the heads of the various depart-ments (maintenance, flight crew, cabin crew, ground opera-tions and the rest) but with experts drawn from these departments and working in the operations room. Who-ever is in charge of the operations room (which never closes) is the final authority: "Frank Borman and all the vice-presidents rolled into one."
The operations centre is quiet—-there is only one type-writer in the room, the rest of the communications being handled by computers and CRT displays. Dispatchers work with schedule planners and the groups of maintenance experts on each type, advised by experts on pilot contracts (which govern duty times) and other specialised areas. The three IBM 194 computers which serve the operations centre and keep track of the entire fleet are located in Charlotte, Virginia, and linked in real time to Miami. Support and reliability, which were expected to be the keys to Eastern's decision up to September, seem to be less important issues now that the introduction of the air-craft is past. Eastern's planned decision in March would pre-empt the full six-month trial, due to finish in June.

Marketing uncertainties
Marketing and the NIH factor are two of the remaining uncertainties. The trial will demonstrate the A300 over a cross-section of Eastern's markets. New York-San Juan is predominantly ethnic/visiting-friends-and-relations, Miami and the other Florida destinations represent varying classes of vacation market, and Atlanta is mainly a busi-ness market. Eastern has become convinced over the past year that the business traveller prefers twin aisles; Eastern hopes to "leapfrog" Delta on some routes, fielding A300s against 727-20Os.
Eastern is being careful about boosting the A300 as something new and wonderful in case the market reacts negatively. The name "Airbus" is not being used: "We don't want people to think we're running a flying Grey-hound," as one executive puts it. The name Airbus has been used in the US before, for high-density services in VFR/ethnic markets.

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Eastern calls the aircraft the "A-300 Whisperliner" (with the hyphen), and anyone reading the information folder with no prior knowledge of the aircraft might be forgiven for thinking that the A300 was something that the engineering boys ran up over a wet weekend, with all-American General Electric engines, of course. Eastern is stressing the good-neighbour aspects of the A300 as well, an increasing benefit in the environment-conscious United States. (If you doubt that description of the USA, just try getting immediate delivery of a 50 miles/gal Honda Accord anywhere in the country.) *•

The fact that the A300 is slightly oversize for Eastern
is another marketing advantage, because the Eastern A300s have fewer seats than any others in service: 203 economy and 26 in first. First-class pitch is 40in and economy pitch is 36in, and seating is eight-abreast at a time when most US trijets, including Eastern TriStars, are moving to nine-abreast layouts.
There remain two main questions. First, will the A300 match up to the economic predictions? Second, will Airbus and Eastern be able to finance a $750-million deal? Participatory finance is the key to the second problem. Broadly, this will mean that the financial institutions behind the Airbus partners and General Electric will move into Eastern as shareholders in the airline's equity. (Genera Electric is a very significant supplier on the A300, and is almost as "hungry" as Airbus Industrie following the loss of the big F101 production programme.) This in turn would allow Eastern to increase its borrowings and finance the A300s without the debt/equity ratio getting completely out of hand. Eastern is now starting talks with European finance institutions.

Eastern would take A300s at a rate of perhaps five to six aircraft a year if it placed an order now, and airframes earmarked for Eastern are already on the line at Toulouse Increasingly, the consequences of a downright rejection of the A300 by Eastern do not bear thinking about.

Phase 2 improvements
The aircraft in service are referred to as Phase 1 air-craft; the initial purchase standard is Phase 2. Most of the 200 improvements requested by Eastern are incorpor- ated on the Phase 1 aircraft. The Phase 2 modifications include combination slide-rafts, eliminating the need for life-raft stowage in the cabins; longer bins in the centreline baggage racks (designed to take garment bags withou which any itinerant North American businessman is under-dressed), and structural plumbing for a possible sixth lavatory unit.
Initial aircraft would probably have the CF6 50C, although the 52,5001b-thrust CF6-50C2 would be standard- ised. There was a "fairly extensive engine competition," says Eastern, but the GE engine eventually won as "a better fit technically for the A300." Eastern has no plans to use the Rolls-Royce RB.211-524 on its TriStars, so argu-ments of commonality did not outweigh the fact that the most powerful version of the British engine is behind the GE engine on thrust and timescale; the 53,0001b RB.211-524D is not due until 1981.

One area in which the build standard is still to be nego- tiated is external finish. Eastern has been making a return to the all-natural metal look of the Rickenbacker days and the "Great Silver Fleet," but this conflicts with Airbus Industrie's ideas of what constitutes good corrosion pro-tection. The manufacturer is not sure that it can offer the same sort of warranties as usual if Eastern takes its air-craft in natural metal.

After talking to Eastern executives it is hard to use the conditional mood in writing about the airline's long-term plans for the A300. Eastern may have invested more face than anything else in the A3001

, but face is worth a great
deal of money in the airline business. It is not often that you hear an executive describe in public an aeroplane which his airline has not yet bought as "a quantum jump in the economics of our operation." Even less often does a vice-president in the same position remark: "Any chief executive who doesn't get off his fanny and go to Toulouse and find out what the economics of this aircraft are about will have to answer to his board." Q