PARIS SPECIAL

The A310 has made an
auspicious start, with an
exemplary flight-test
programme, but will it
make money?

The dilemmas of aviation
David Mason assesses the economic scene at the end of two

difficult years

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ortuitiously, the deadline for this
article falls two years to the day after
I took over the Editor's chair at
Flight International. They have been, in aviation terms, quite extraordinary and intriguing years.
At one of the earliest press briefings I attended, at the roll-out of the Boeing 767 in Seattle in August 1981, Tex Bouillion offered the aviation operators a remark-able deal. "We are prepared to sell the aircraft more or less at cost in order to keep the airlines going", he said.
He could hardly have predicted that the airlines would need to be kept going through two desperately lean years: that two of them would not be kept going and would go bankrupt; that between them (the lata carriers at least) they would lose some $4 billion; and that several of them would continue to exist only through support from their governments, from their bankers, from more profitable parts of their parent companies, or from the manufacturers who could sustain their own operations most effectively by arranging leasing deals which have stood airliner financing on its head.

If the large airliner manufacturers and operators faced severe problems, general aviation has gone through still more diffi-cult times, with less assistance. Statistics from this area are more depressing than from any other. Wichita, home of Beech and Cessna, has become a ghost of its former self, employing little more than half of the people it employed two years ago. Cessna provides an illustration of the paucity of orders, with sales for 1982 worth $625 million, compared with $830 million for 1981 and $1,000 million for 1980. And world-wide shipments from 20 manufacturers show a universal decline; deliveries for the first four months of the

US fiscal year, October to January, plum-etted through 1981, 1982, and 1983, from 3,586 to 2,386 to 1,147.
The engine makers, of course, suffer their own traumas in the wake of the airframe manufacturers' problems. Rolls-Royce, for example, reports a pre-tax loss of £91 million for 1982 because of lack of demand and sharply reduced workload. Even military aviation, by custom the saviour of its civil sister, seems to be losing its way. The orphaned MX missile has only found a compromise home. The F-18 lives under a perpetual barrage of hostility. Europe shows no signs of agree-ing either its requirement or its prod-uction for an air-superiority fighter for the

1990s. And despite the Falkland Islands experience, Vstol and vectored thrust fighters are still seen as the playthings of eccentric air forces.

To escape from this choking net of problems, aviation planners face a great deal of serious thinking as they develop their strategy for the rest of the decade, and beyond that into the remainder of the twentieth century.
Inevitably, the market will turn round. The world economic recovery which began in the first quarter of 1983 could be the start, and even if this is a false recovery the recession will ultimately end, and the demand for aviation in all its forms will
grow healthily.
However, in the civil arena especially,
there is much ground to be covered before
increased traffic can be converted to new
airframe orders. The load factors have to

The Boeing 757 replaces the world's most successful airliner. Can it succeed like the 727?

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