AIR TRANSPORT

Fokker keeps the pressure on Africa
AMSTERDAM-ZUIDOOST

An imminent order for two
Fokker F,28-Mk400Q aircraft
from Zimbabwe (plus options
on two more), and the
purchase of two F.27
Maritimes by the Nigerian
Government, have rekindled
optimism at Fokker about
sales prospects in Africa,
reports Nick Fadugba.

After making early inroads
into the continent, the
company recently suffered a
few reverses which, coupled
with Africa's economic prob-
lems, had raised doubts about
this traditional Fokker
market.

In particular, Nigeria
Airways' much-publicised
phasing out of its entire F.27
and F.28 fleet and the US
Government's virtual "veto"
(for political reasons) of the
sale of five F.28s to Libya were
blows to the pride and pocket
of the Dutch aircraft
company.
For political reasons, too,
Fokker is banned from selling
aeroplanes to South Africa,
where a big market exists for
Fokker 100s to replace old
Boeing 737s.
Fokker has established a
solid presence in Africa. The
continent accounts for 14 per
cent of today's F.27 world
fleet and 16 per cent of F.28
total sales. Libya, Nigeria,
Algeria, Zaire, and Angola are
the biggest customers.
Roger Lulof, Fokker's
director of sales for English
speaking Africa, says: "Africa
is still important to Fokker.
After Boeing, we are the
continent's leading supplier of

aircraft". Lulof is confident
that the company's past
success will provide a natural
springboard for future busi-
ness.

The imminent sale to
Zimbabwe represents a
significant triumph for
Fokker, as it was won after
patient negotiations and in
the face of strong competition
from other manufacturers,
particularly British Aerospace
and Boeing. In addition to
aircraft suitability, finance
was an important consid-
eration.

Fokker's two F.28s were
offered for $11-5 million
each, with a Netherlands
Government-guaranteed in-
terest rate of 9-9-5 per cent
per annum over ten years.
BAe's 146-200 was, report-
edly, priced at $14 million
with finance available at 12
per cent per annum, while
Boeing's 737-200 was offered
for $17-9 million at 12-14 per
cent interest per annum.

Nigeria's purchase of the
two F.27 Maritimes (for its
Air Force) is interpreted in
Amsterdam as an expression
of faith in Fokker by an
important customer, which
partly offsets the sudden
withdrawal of Nigeria
Airways' patronage.
The airline's decision to
phase out its Fokker fleet was
speeded up after the 1983
Nigeria Airways F.28 crash.
But, a Fokker spokesman
points out with evident relief,
an official inquiry attributed
the fatal accident to pilot
error, not to aircraft
malfunction.

Says Roger Lulof: "Fokker

would have preferred to have
taken back Nigeria Airways'
seven F.28s and then supplied
the airline with new Fokker
100s on very favourable terms
in 1987/1988". Instead, a
French consortium is nego-
tiating to purchase the
aircraft for $32-35 million. An
earlier bid by a Canadian
company fell through.
"Fokker has had an excel-
lent relationship with Nigeria,
has trained over 300
Nigerians, and still hopes to
do more business there", adds
Lulof.
In common with other
short- and medium-haul
aircraft manufacturers,
Fokker has been adversely
affected by the dis-
proportionate attention most
African airlines give to hard
currency and prestigious
intercontinental routes in
comparison with their domes-
tic and regional networks.
According to Fokker's
director of sales for French-
speaking Africa, Co Dorsman,
there is insufficient appre-
ciation in Africa of the vital
role smaller aircraft can play
in opening up new routes,
supplementing larger aircraft,
and in reducing operating
costs.

Says Dorsman: "In Euro-
pean and American airlines
economists and financial
advisors play a key role in
decision-making, but this is
not so in Africa. However, one
positive outcome of the
continent's economic crisis is
that air transport planners
are now adopting a more
realistic approach to route
networks and fleet structures,

with less importance attached
to political and prestige
considerations".
To counter Africa's lack
of capital—the main imped-
iment to aircraft sales—
Fokker has assumed a flexible
attitude to financing, leaving
the door wide open to barter
deals. This strategy has
worked in the past. In the
mid-1970s an F.28-Mk4000
was sold to the Ivory Coast in
exchange for cocoa and coffee.
Adds Dorsman: "Although
we prefer to deal in money,
there is nothing wrong or new
about barter. Fair deals can be
arranged on this basis—for
petroleum, palm oil, coffee,
cocoa, or the like—but it is for
the country concerned, not
Fokker, to propose it".

With Africa's turboprop
aircraft requirements over the
next 15 years estimated at 354
units, the stakes are high.
Aerospatiale/Aeritalia' s
ATR42 is considered the prin-
cipal threat to the Fokker 50.
An official explains: "France
would not hesitate to give
financial assistance to any
African country which doesn't
have the money to buy the
aeroplane and can't obtain it
on the open market. As a non-
subsidised company this puts
us at a disadvantage".

Despite this, Roger Lulof
predicts that Fokker's im-
pressive track record in Africa
and emphasis on after-sales
product support could be a
trump card in the sales battle
ahead. Fokker adds: "We
expect to achieve as much
success in Africa with our
Fokker 50 and Fokker 100 as
we did with our F.27 and F.28.

Air Ivoire and Air Mauritanie are both potential customers for Fokker's F.IOO and F.50

FLIGHT International, 6 July 1981