doing in his decision to join with
Piedmont.
"We are realists, and Mr
Henson knew that the Piedmont
merger would allow him to
expand his airline the way he
wanted," Prestburg maintains.
The $1-7 .billion takeover of
Piedmont by USAir is seen as a
positive move by Henson.
Prestburg says that, as a Piedmont
subsidiary, Henson maintains its
autonomy and this is unlikely to
change under USAir. USAir has
wrought changes within the
airline, however. Mr Henson has
been appointed chairman and a
new president will be brought in.
When the ownership changeover
takes place on July 1, 1989, it is
expected that Henson Airlines will change its fleet to USAir Group livery. The new name tipped for the commuter is USAir Commuter.

Henson has had a long association with USAir, although not as a subsidiary. From 1967, Henson struck an agreement with Allegheny Airlines and began developing his fleet and route network.

Routes spread
By 1981 Henson had developed a route structure serving Maryland's eastern and western centres feeding into the hub termi-nals of Greater Philadelphia, Baltimore/ Washington International, and Washington National airports, with services to the Virginia Peninsula operating over routes from its hubs to Patrick Henry International Airport at Newport News, Virginia. Services were also established to Richmond and New York.
The airline's fleet had grown to four Shorts 330s and three Dash 7s. Prestburg says that the decision to invest in the Dash 7 was made with its short take-off and landing features (Stol) in mind.
"The Dash 7 is particularly suited to our flights from Washington National," he said. Three years later the company also ordered eight Dash 8-100s in a contract valued at $45 million.
Under the Piedmont programme, which began in 1983, Henson used its route free-dom to inaugurate services to both Norfolk, Virginia, and Islip, New York. The airline contined to support Piedmont's growing hub at the Baltimore airport, and services were extended to the Virginia cities of Lynchburg and Roanoke and into the eastern Pennsylvania communities of Harrisburg, Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, and Allentown/ Bethlehem/Easton. Soon after, Henson extended further north to serve Boston, Massachusetts.

In early 1987 the regional started its Dash 8 service to 11 Florida cities under the trade name "Piedmont Shuttle Link". It also became an international carrier by

Top The Dash 7 may be phased out of Henson operations in favour of Dash 8-300s, which offer the benefit of much higher performance. Above Richard Henson in his element at the helm of his commuter aircraft

inaugurating five services to the Bahamas. The airline's Beech 99s were completely phased out and the preliminary phase-out of the Shorts 330s began.
The number of passengers carried during 1987 broke all company records at more than 1 • 3 million, and the first half of 1988 saw the company consolidate its fleet and continue its controlled growth.

Business booms

According to Prestburg, Henson Airlines is now the second-largest regional airline in the USA, serving 43 cities and all seven of the major Bahamian destinations. The first half-year's expansion resulted in an increase in passenger boardings of 16-9 per cent, with revenue passenger-miles rising by 22-3 per cent and available seat-miles increasing by 20 • 4 per cent. Financial records were broken every month to July as a record six months gross earnings reached $4-6 million. Despite Henson becoming a USAir subsidiary, Prestburg says that there are

development plans on the drawing board and the airline's fleet is healthy.
Henson operates 12 Dash 8-100s, five Dash 7s, and eight Shorts 330 aircraft. By the end of the year the airline expects to have 21 Dash 8 50-seat aircraft and five 330s, while retaining its Dash 7s. Prestburg says that 32 Dash 8-100s will be in operation by September 1989. Having converted the final six Dash 8 options to firm orders, the third quarter of 1989 will see Henson complete the phase-out of the Shorts 330s and will be a completely FAR 121 operation utilising all new-generation aircraft.
The airline is continuing to study the economics of trading-in its Dash 7s for the Dash 8-300. "We are finding the much higher performance of the -300 to be a posi-tive factor in our continued fleet evaluation," Prestburg maintains, adding, "If all goes according to plan we will have a fleet of young Dash 8 aircraft with the added bonus of common pilot training".
Henson will continue with its plans for development autonomously under USAir, but the takeover has prompted speculation that the airline may find itself as, only one-fourth of the mega-carrier's regional operations.
USAir owns four regional commuter carriers in the USA, and some experts specu-late that these may become one major regional company. The number of aircraft in the Henson, Suburban, and Pennsylvania Airlines, and Jetstream International fleets total more than 150.

Alternatives under consideration may include the regionals remaining autonomous in their operations, with some rationalisation of routes and business; USAir may decide to split the four airlines into two separate opera-tions; or all four airlines may be merged, to create a "mega-regional" carrier.
Prestburg says that Henson will continue
to develop its route network and fleet.
"Under Henson's leadership, and using his
excellent entrepreneurial skills, I don't think
you'll find a more efficeint operation in the
country." D

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