Douglas confident on MD-11 deliveries
by John Bailey
in Long Beach
McDonnell Douglas is
confident it can meet the deliv-
ery commitments undertaken
with recent MD-11 and MD-80
orders, despite mounting pres-
sure on its Long Beach assem-
bly lines.
Including options and reser-
vations, MDC's Douglas
Aircraft division now has 253
MD-1 Is and 865 MD-80s on its
orderbook. In addition, it has
two major military programmes,
the US Navy's T-45 trainer and
the US Air Force's C-17 trans-
port, which will together add up
to 510 aircraft—if both pro-
grammes survive forecast
procurement cutbacks. This
gives Douglas a potential back-
log of 1,628 aircraft to build by
the middle of the next decade.
While not all of these aircraft
will be built at Long Beach
(T-45 production will be based
north of Los Angeles, at
Palmdale), the mammoth
logjam of orders will clearly
pose problems for Douglas,
which has already experienced
production hold-ups on its
MD-80 line.

Under control

Announcing 50 MD-11 and 100
MD-80 commitments, Ameri-
can Airlines president Robert
Crandall reportedly said he had
been "very unhappy" with
Douglas' failure to meet MD-80
delivery schedules last year, but
added that the problem now
appeared to be under control:
"They have been delivering
planes right on schedule and to
a very high quality".
The production rate for the
MD-80 is now 2-5 aircraft a
week, and Douglas has no plans
to increase this, although deliv-
eries will apparently not be fully
back on schedule until early
next year. The peak production
rate for the MD-11 will be one a
week by 1992, and Douglas
plans to hire another 5,000
workers as the assembly line
builds up speed. This will give
the company 19,000 employees
on the MD-11 by 1992.
The new personnel will not
necessarily have previous
experience in the aerospace
industry, even though there is a
large skilled employee base in
southern California. Douglas
is confident, however, that

its training procedures are
adequate to handle the
increased demand.
The shortage of space at
Long Beach has already
prompted Douglas to acquire a
disused Rockwell B-1B factory
in Columbus, Ohio. The
company has hired 2,000
former Rockwell employees to
man the 4 million-square-foot
plant, which is producing
subassemblies for the C-17
programme.

Move out denied

Douglas denies that any of its
established programmes will be
moved wholesale out of Long
Beach to Columbus, but Bill
Messecar, director of marketing
for the MD-11, says: "We are
looking at a whole lot of places.
The business requires that we
look at all our activities, and in
doing that, we may find the
perfect location. Logic would
tell you that if we are going to
do something in a place that we
haven't used before, we would
start with something new. It's
much harder to move an exist-
ing facility that has already got a
workforce and tooling located."
This suggests that future
derivatives of existing
programmes, such as the
proposed MD-90 propfan or the
MD-11 stretch, may be based
away from Long Beach. There
are apparently no plans to
increase MD-80 production on
the satellite assembly line in
Shanghai, where 25 MD-82s
are being built under licence for
China's national airline.

No time wasted

One sign of the company's
determination to waste no time
with MD-11 certification is its
decision not to hold a tradi-
tional roll-out ceremony when
the first aircraft leaves the pro-
duction line. This aircraft, a
General Electric CF6-80C2-
powered all-cargo version
destined for Federal Express,
will be the first of four to take
part in the year-long certifica-
tion flight-test programme.
Douglas says its first priority
is to achieve Ship One's maiden
flight to the McDonnell
Douglas flight-test centre in
Yuma, Arizona, and that it
cannot afford time to paint the
aircraft in company colours (a
week-long undertaking) and

schedule a roll-out before
departure.
Initial production of the MD-
11 is several weeks behind the
schedule drawn up when the
programme was launched in
December 1986, but Douglas
says this is due to inevitable
teething problems in acquiring
components from suppliers and
starting fabrication. The final-
assembly building is starting to
resemble a fully-fledged prod-
uction line, with the first fuse-
lage joined and second fuselage
join under way. Ship One also
has its undercarriage installed,
and will roll out of the assembly
building for its first pressure
checks shortly.
The third aircraft, which will
be the Pratt & Whitney
PW4000-powered certification
aircraft, has had the centre
E-barrel joined to the wings,
and awaits the arrival of the
forward and aft fuselage
sections, which are now
complete in a neighbouring
fabrication building.
Production will continue
during the certification
programme, with completed
aircraft being held at Long
Beach for immediate delivery
once certification with both
engine types is complete. The
Rolls-Royce RB.211-524L
turbofan, which was launched
with Air Europe's recent order,
should be certificated on the
MD-11 in 1993.

Douglas

McDonnell Douglas confirms
that it has abandoned
discussions with Airbus Indus-
trie over possible collaboration
on a re-winged MD-11 "Super
Stretch", and is now searching
for potential Far East partners.
The proposed collaboration
with Airbus, in which a
35ft-stretched version of the
MD-11 would have been mated
with the A330/A340 wing, was
one of several options being
considered by Douglas. The on-
off discussions with the Euro-
pean consortium were finally
abandoned late last year,
however, after the two sides
were unable to reach agreement
on the so-called AM300.

Growth options
Douglas is considering two
growth configurations for the
MD-11, both involving a 35ft
fuselage extension. The first,
known simply as the MD-11
Stretch, would have the existing
wing and powerplants, but
would sacrifice range to main-
tain the same gross weight. The
second, Super Stretch, config-
uration would be a higher-
gross-weight aircraft with
uprated engines and a new wing
to give it greater range. It would
have either a modifed version of
the existing MD-11 wing or a
completely new unit.

24 FLIGHT INTERNATIONAL, 25 February 1989