Around the world in 80 hours

TBM 700 covered over 38,000km, with only 33min for technical stops

" T had always wanted to fly round the
J.world," says Jacques LeMaigre du
Breuil, "and, after a year of owning a TBM
700, I realised that this was potentially the
aircraft to do it in."

Du Breuil has several challenging flights in his logbook, having in 1984 won himself and co-pilot Jean Mermon a place in the Guiness Book of Records by flying a Cessna 182 the 3,300km (l,760nm) from Dakar, (Africa) to Recife (Brazil) to cele-brate the 50th anniversary of the same flight carried out by another Frenchman, Jean Mermoz. Du Breuil owns a pair of TBM 700s. "You can't find another aircraft like it for the combination of fuel burn,

speed and efficiency," he says.
The round-the-world flight was carried out with two other pilots, Olivier Waisblat and Nicolas Gorodiche. The total flight time was 79.58h and average speed while airborne was 255kt (470km/h). (Overall average speed was 217kt.) The great-circle distance covered was 36,944km (the ac-tual distance was 38,685km).
"No problems" were experienced dur-ing the flight, says Du Breuil. The average time for the 18 technical stops was just 33min. The TBM 700 was completely production standard, apart from an In-marsat input for a facsimile machine, and an HF communications set.

"We definitely have a good range of products," says de Raffin Dourny (who was previously a senior vice-president of Eurocopter). "I am certain that we are competitive in the way we do things." He adds that Socala "...must not try and get into businesses that it is not good at. We have excellent resources. We just have to use them in the best way we can to improve our business."
Those resources include a covered area

of 80,000m2

at Socata's Tarbes production
site, within which are 150 modern ma-chine tools which can be used for virtu-ally any machining operation. There are two aircraft-assembly lines — one for the TBM 700, the other for the light singles, and a growing expertise in the develop-ment of composite materials, enabling Socata to build the enormous belly fairing for the Airbus Industrie A340, for exam-ple. This is a risk-sharing venture, which meant that Socata had to raise the devel-opment money it needed from banks.

Despite the inevitable workforce reduc-tions resulting from the recession, morale on the factory floor remains high. "We all identify very strongly with what we make," says de Raffin Dourny. "There are still some people here from the Morane Saulnier days, and a lot of our staff are highly skilled. They can form or cut virtually anything."
Other subcontract work at Socata dem-onstrates the company's versatility. Fuse-lage components for the Airbus A300, A310 and A320, the ATR 42 and 72 and the Falcon 900 business jet all reflect the strong links with Aerospatiale. Military work includes a contract to build com-plete forward-fuselage panels for the Lockheed C-130, and external fuel-tank construction and repair for Dassault Mi-rage 3s. Socata also builds a large propor-tion of the fuselage for the Ecureuil helicopter. This work has been under-mined seriously, however, by the virtual collapse in the helicopter business. Pro-duction has fallen from 30 shipsets a month to just six.

CARIBBEAN LINE
Production of the Caribbean line — the Trinidad, Tobago and Tampico singles — was set at about 12 aircraft a month at the beginning of the year. This has now fallen to around eight a month. Production of the TBM 700 remains at 1.5 aircraft a month. The factory employs 1,060 people, but is working at about 85% capacity. Unless there is a sudden upturn in busi-ness, this means that the workforce will be reduced to around 900 by the end of this year. "We'll achieve the reduction mainly through pre-retirement."
When it was acquired by Aerospatiale, Socata was well into production of the highly successful Rallye single, around 3,600 examples of which were built. In

1979, the Rallye gave way to the TB 9 Tampico and the TB 10 Tobago. These were followed in 1981 by the Epsilon trainer, by the Trinidad TB 20 and 21 between 1981-4, the Omega in 1989, the TBM 700 in 1990 and the TB 200 in 1991.

With the abrupt drop in US light-aircraft production (partly because of product-liability legislation affecting do-mestic manufacturers), Socata has been able to build itself a niche in the USA which has contributed to a total order-book for the Caribbean line of more than 1,500 aircraft.
At the lower end of the Caribbean range is the simple Tampico Club, which sells in basic form for Fr642,000 ($110,000). At the top end, there is the 187kt (345km/h) turbo-charged Trinidad TC, with retractable undercarriage, which, in fully equipped form, is sold at Frl.56 million. At Fr882,090, the new fuel-injected TB 200 Tobago (reviewed on P34) sits about half-way through the performance range.
Flying schools now account for almost all of current light aircraft production. More than 520 Caribbeans have been sold to 24 schools around the world, including China (the Civil Aviation Administration of China bought 28 TB 20s). "We think we now answer all possible training

requirements," says de Raffin Dourny, "from basic to professional training, as well as for touring and business." Socata only builds aircraft to order. Basic airframes are held ready, assembly of the final product beginning when the customer's specifications are received. The aircraft are assembled in a clean, modern building and, at the time of Flight Interna-tional's visit, the production line was busy, with several Tobagos being prepared for the Senasa flying school, in Spain.
A big step into the unknown came with the TBM 700 turbine single (reviewed by Flight International, 10 January, 1990). It is, by any standards, an unusual product, standing next to the Pilatus Turbo-Porter, the Cessna Caravan 1 and the Pilatus PC-12 models in the market for single-engined turbine passenger/ utility aircraft.
Socata has committed extensive re-sources to the TBM 700, originally with US partner Mooney, which had a 30% share in the programme. The partnership foundered in May 1991, leaving Socata to shoulder the development cost of the
aircraft alone, including building a new
factory at Tarbes.
The TBM 700 is projected as a high-
performance single to compete with twins
on the basis of lower purchase and

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