

## UK turns down Puma option

The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) has discarded the option of acquiring South African Aerospace Puma medium-transport helicopters to replace its ageing Westland Wessex fleet. Instead it is looking at using the Westland Lynx in the light-support-helicopter role.

The Royal Air Force's Wessex fleet needs to be replaced by the end of the decade at the very latest, with the MoD having looked at several alternatives.

"We are aware that the South African Air Force is looking to sell Pumas...this was something that was vaguely considered," says the MoD. "We now intend to meet the light-support-helicopter requirement through the use of existing assets, and possibly dual-ruled medium-support helicopters."

In particular, the MoD is looking to re-assign "ex-Navy or ex-Army Lynx now surplus to requirements". Additional Lynx AH.7s would also become available when replaced by the eventual winner of the UK's attack-helicopter programme.

These are unlikely to be converted to the Lynx AH.9 utility-helicopter standard. Using the Lynx as a Wessex replacement will reduce the light-support helicopter's lift-capability. The Wessex can carry up to 16 troops, while the Lynx has room for ten. □

Lynx will replace the Wessex



# Boeing studies Asian regional-jet alliance

BY GRAHAM WARWICK  
IN ATLANTA

Boeing is studying a 90-seat airliner jointly with Japan and China. The project was revealed when Boeing Commercial Airplane Group appointed former marketing vice-president Dick James as vice-president of its new small-aircraft study programme.

Boeing's director of product strategy, Bob de Vore, says that the project is an evolution of continuing study, but signals an increased emphasis on "the small end of the market."

The study team consists of 25 people from Boeing, Japan Aircraft Industry (JAI) and China National Aero-Technology Import and Export (CATIC). It will grow as the small-aircraft programme increases, de Vore says.

The US manufacturer forecasts sales of around 1,000 aircraft in the 70- to 100-seat market between now and 2013. The study is focused on a 90-seater, but will cover the 80- to 100-seat market, de Vore says. Boeing's new 737-X range covers the 108- to 160-seat market.

Several designs will be studied, but the emphasis will be on configurations having commonality with the 737, de Vore

says, because of Boeing's established customer base. Earlier studies settled on 108 seats as the smallest practical size for the 737's six-abreast fuselage, so the new small aircraft is likely to have a narrower cross-section, he says.

"Determining potential

commonality with the next-generation 737 will be a key objective of the analysis," Boeing says.

Examples of potential commonality include "systems, engines and the empennage", de Vore says. Commonality with the 737-X would reduce



Air China is set to boost its 747-400 fleet

## USA moves to save Air China orders

The USA is to renew China's "most-favoured nation" (MFN) trading status, safeguarding Boeing efforts to secure a \$5 billion Air China order for over 50 airliners.

The US manufacturer was "seriously concerned" that a failure to renew China's MFN status, because of human-rights abuses, would scupper plans

for further sales to the Chinese flag carrier. Air China operates 46 Boeings, ranging from 737s to 747s, and has six on order.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Air China is negotiating to buy up to 15 737s, 15 757s, 15 777s and some 747-400s, for delivery between 1996 and 1998. Boeing acknowledges that "serious dis-

## DoD gears up for Lucas investigation

Lucas Industries is facing suspension, or exclusion, from receiving US Department of Defense (DoD) contracts, following a criminal investigation which is now under way into alleged faulty aircraft-gearbox production at its Lucas Western subsidiary.

The UK company believes that the investigation concerns the alleged use of non-conforming materials, mainly in airframe-mounted accessory

drives (AMADs) for the McDonnell Douglas F-18. Lucas is puzzled, however, by press reports that AMAD faults have caused 167 F-18 emergency landings.

The company says that it has never been contacted by the US Navy concerning the alleged AMAD failures, or informed of any connection between the investigation of Lucas Western and failures occurring in the F-18.

Lucas says that its information indicates that the AMAD gearboxes exceed the design mean-time-between-failure requirements.

The *Wall Street Journal* quotes sources as saying that a report by the DoD's Defense Criminal Investigative Service contains suspicions that faulty AMAD gearboxes caused several F-18 engine fires and forced landings. Lucas says that it has been unable to gain access to the report, or even confirm that it exists.

Lucas acknowledges that it