

# Boeing drives 777 ahead but loses Gulf Air orders

**B**OEING IS continuing its intensive effort to push the 777 into service on time after confirming that it has lost Gulf Air's order for six aircraft, with six options.

The Bahrain-based carrier dropped its commitment to the General Electric GE90-powered aircraft after deciding that it would end up with excess capacity.

Separately, however, Virgin Atlantic has confirmed that it has placed a \$1 million deposit with Boeing to secure six 777 delivery positions for aircraft, with engine choice still to be decided.

Virgin commercial executive director Paul Griffiths says that the airline is primarily interested in larger and longer-range versions of the 777. There is not yet a clear delivery schedule.

Virgin's UK rival, British Airways, expects meanwhile that its first aircraft will pass through London Heathrow in its colours on 20 April, although delivery is not due for some time. The second GE90-powered 777 — for British Airways — is expected to be flown this month.

United Airlines began its month-long, service-ready validation of the Boeing 777 on 1 April. United aircrew, mechanics and ground crew will work alongside Boeing personnel dur-



Trent tests on 747 testbed complete the engine set

ing the 90-cycle programme. Boeing pilots retain command authority, but United staff actually fly and service the aircraft.

The flights are required by the US Federal Aviation Administration as part of the 1,000-cycle validation programme to achieve 180min extended-range twin-engine operations (ETOPS) at entry into service.

FAA associate administrator for regulation and certification Tony Broderick says that "...it is almost eerie how well the programme is going".

The aircraft should be type-certificated by mid-April, but Broderick says that it will take "another month or so" for the

FAA to complete its analysis of the ETOPS data. A senior BA source says that the UK is prepared to grant 120min ETOPS type-approval.

United hopes that its ETOPS approval will coincide with, or closely follow, entry into service. It wants initially to operate the 777 between London and Washington DC and Frankfurt and Chicago. First delivery is due on 17 May and first revenue flight is scheduled for 7 June.

Rolls-Royce has delivered the first Trent 800 to Boeing for installation on a 777, with the first flight scheduled for late May. Flight testing on Boeing's 747 testbed is complete. □

## SIA and Tata want revised bids in aircraft contest

**S**INGAPORE AIRLINES (SIA) and its Indian joint-venture partner Tata Industries have told airframe and engine manufacturers to resubmit tenders for a 150-seat aircraft order.

The contract is for up to 16 aircraft to equip a proposed start-up domestic airline. A decision had been expected by the end of March.

Indian sources say, however, that the submitted tender packages proved too diverse for a selection to be made. The requirements have been refined and the six bidders told to resubmit their proposals by mid-April.

Aircraft in the competition include the Boeing 737-300/400, the Airbus A320 and the McDonnell Douglas (MDC) MD80/90. Proposed engines are the CFM56 (for the 737 and A320), the International Aero Engines V2500 (for the A320 and MD-90) and the Pratt and Whitney JT8D-200 (for the MD-80).

New considerations include an Indian offset-package proposed by MDC chief executive Harry Stonecipher. This would include the manufacture of parts for the MD-80/90 and MD-11. Another is India's decision to temper run-away growth in the country's domestic-airline industry.

New Delhi sources suggest that approval might now initially cover a smaller batch of aircraft introduced over a longer period. □

## Alitalia to select 70-seater shortly

**A**LITALIA WILL decide imminently whether to select British Aerospace's Avroliner or Fokker's Jetline family as its new 70- to 100-seat regional aircraft.

The airline initially favoured Fokker to fulfil its 15-aircraft requirement, but its board declined to make a final decision at a 5 April meeting after Avro presented renewed industrial offset proposals.

Avro's offer now includes 200,000 man-hours of work for Alenia via the planned

ATR/Jetstream/Avro regional-airliner venture, together with an offer of AlliedSignal engine-maintenance work to troubled Piaggio.

Sources close to Alitalia say that the board's decision-making has been muddled by pressure to try to trade-off a Fokker deal against a Dutch military purchase of Agusta helicopters. Military observers, however, regard the latter contest as a race between McDonnell Douglas Helicopter Systems AH-64 Apache and the Eurocopter Tiger. □

## US airlines dispute timetable and costs for flight-data recorders

**T**HE US AIRLINE Transport Association (ATA) says that a US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommendation to require more sophisticated flight-data recorders on older Part 121 passenger aircraft is too expensive and unattainable within the timescale proposed.

The NTSB says that each installation would cost between \$20,000 and \$70,000, but the

ATA believes that the overall task could cost \$658 million, with an average cost per aircraft of \$158,000.

The ATA says that it supports the NTSB's work, but it adds that "...the recommendations raise extraordinary complicated engineering, manufacturing, and operational issues, each of which is exacerbated by the size and design of the fleets that would be affected". □