

# FedEx launches Ayres Loadmaster

**A**GRICULTURAL-aircraft maker Ayres of Albany, Georgia, has launched its Loadmaster LM200 cargo aircraft with an order for 50 from FedEx. The parcel carrier also has options for 200 additional aircraft over 15 years from first delivery in December 1999.

The single-pilot Loadmaster LM200 is powered by two LHTEC CTP800 turboshaft engines driving a single propeller through a common gearbox. It is an all-new aircraft, although the wing is based on that of Ayres' Thrush "cropduster". The LM200 is designed to carry a 3,400kg payload, or three FedEx LD3 containers.

A 30-month certification programme is expected to start in mid-1997, with the first flight planned for the end of 1998. FedEx vice-president supplemental air operations, Mark Blair, says: "This aircraft complements our feeder network...it is a natural fit between the



*Fred Ayres models his latest development*

Cessna Caravan and the Fokker F27, with the added benefit that the freight can be containerised".

Ayres president Fred Ayres says that, beyond the FedEx deal, he expects to see interest in the aircraft coming from emerging countries looking for a low-cost maritime-patrol aircraft or firebomber. "We

have not started talking to other customers yet," he says, "but the world is our market."

FedEx plans to use the LM200 initially in USA operations, although it would introduce the aircraft into Europe if rules governing single-turboprop regulations were to be relaxed. □

# Visionaire kicks off Vantage testing

**V**ISIONAIRE HAS BEGUN flight-testing its single-engined Vantage business jet with a first flight on 16 November at Scaled Composites in Mojave, California. Test pilot and director of operations at Scaled Composites, Doug Shane, says that the aircraft was taken to 10,000ft (3,200m) and "...performed as well as we all were confident it would".

Phase one of the \$50 million test and certification programme involves 40 flights of the proof-of-concept vehicle: phase two, which starts in mid-1997, will see the introduction of four more aircraft. US certification is expected in the final quarter of 1998, by which time six aircraft will be ready for delivery. VisionAire plans to take production to 115 a year by 2003.



*Visionaire flew its Vantage for the first time on 16 November*

Jim Rice, chairman and chief executive of VisionAire, says that the company has 52 firm, "non-cancellable" orders for the \$1.65 million aircraft. Composite structures for the Vantage will be produced at a new Scaled Composites factory at Montrose, Colorado. Burt Rutan, president of Scaled Composites, says that the move to

Colorado will give a 12% operating advantage over the firm's higher-cost base in Mojave, California.

VisionAire showed a Vantage cabin mock-up. Also on display was a mock-up of Century Aerospace's \$1.85 million Century Jet single-engined business jet. The Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm is aiming for first flight "within about a year". □

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ■ DUAL PAC CHANGES

Soloy has renamed its twin-turbine, single-propeller conversion of the Cessna Caravan, the "Pathfinder 21", and has increased the gross weight to 5,700kg to offer additional payload. The revisions have delayed production by 12 months, with US approval now expected in May 1998.

### ■ SABRELINER EXTENSION

Illinois-based Avtech is offering to extend the life of the 300-500 Rockwell Sabreliner business jets still flying by 5,000h — an increase of 50% — for about \$45,000. The fee covers a detailed inspection for corrosion and does not include any repair work. The first customer is Florida-based Dialysis Laboratories.

### ■ PC-12 SIMULATOR

Pilatus Aircraft of Switzerland and Simcom International have agreed to develop a simulator for the PC-12 single-engined turboprop. The Level 6 flight-training device will be produced from actual aircraft parts and will feature a full 180° wrap-around visual system. It will be operated by Simcom at its Orlando, Florida, training centre.

### ■ DORNIER AMBULANCE

A Fairchild Dornier 328 has been delivered to Austria's Tyrolean Air Ambulance, configured with seats and stretchers, a 19-seat corporate/VIP interior, or a 31-passenger layout. The company sees a corporate market for its planned 328 turbofan-powered derivative.

# Universal Avionics offers fivefold improved GPS/Glonass system

**A**NEW satellite-navigation system, promising a fivefold improvement in accuracy, has been unveiled by Universal Avionics.

The GNSS-2400 uses the US global-positioning system (GPS) and its Russian equivalent, the Glonass. The working prototype

was proven during a flight from Switzerland to Florida, and demonstrated at the show.

The initial tests show that, by using the Russian and US systems, position is typically within 16m (50ft) of the truth, compared to the 100m for GPS alone. This is

achieved by having access to 48 satellites on 24 channels which, Universal claims, will provide 100% availability and continuity of service for oceanic, enroute, terminal and non-precision approaches.

According to Universal president Hubert Naimer, the develop-

ment is a breakthrough. "The worldwide aviation community has been concerned about the exclusive control of GPS maintained by the US Department of Defense", he says. US certification is expected by mid-1997 and the new units will cost around \$25,000. □