

Sikorsky sees S-76 fractional-ownership market emerging

GRAHAM WARWICK/WASHINGTON DC

SIKORSKY BELIEVES that at least one fractional-ownership programme using its S-76 helicopter will be launched in early 1998. Interest in helicopter fractional-ownership "has exploded", says director, commercial programmes, Mike Moran, and the company is talking to "several" potential operators.

Richard Santulli, chairman of Executive Jet Aviation (EJA), says that he has been approached for advice by Sikorsky's parent company, United Technologies (UTC).

EJA operates the successful NetJets business-jet fractional-ownership programme, but is "...not interested in the S-76," Santulli stresses.

"UTC officials said they would like to speak to me to see if fractional ownership makes any sense. We will meet in January," he adds. "They have asked for my advice on what they should do. People have come to them to try to do a fractional programme," he says.

Moran indicates that Sikorsky has received approaches from entities interested in helicopter fractional-ownership—"a couple in the USA and a couple in Europe". The

manufacturer is interested, he says.

Any fractional-ownership programme would have to be regional, rather than national, because of the helicopter's relatively limited range and speed. The north-east USA, close to Sikorsky's factory and a region where some corporate S-76s are already based, is a likely candidate location.

"I am not a formal advisor," cautions Santulli, who has doubts about an S-76 fractional-ownership programme, citing the cost of the helicopter. "Sikorsky makes an expensive helicopter. That's hard for such a regional market," he says. □

Revived Luscombe 8F production heads east

KATE SARFIELD/LONDON

TWO US companies have agreed to resume the manufacture of the Luscombe 8 light aircraft, 36 years after production of the piston single was halted.

Renaissance Aircraft of Monkton, Maryland, will build the aircraft for US certification, while the Don Luscombe Aviation History Foundation (DLAHF) will allow access to the original Luscombe 8F which is on display in their museum in Phoenix, Arizona. As part of the licensing agreement, the Foundation will also provide components and parts.

Renaissance has linked with Canadian light-aircraft manufac-

turer Zenair and Czech Aircraft Works of the Czech Republic. Zenair will assemble the first four aircraft and provide training for Czech Aircraft Works' engineers. Manufacture will then be transferred to the Czech company.

The US company is also looking for investors to fund the programme and claims to have received "a great deal of interest from a number of private individuals".

The 8F was conceived by Luscombe in 1931, and by the time Silair ceased production in 1961, around 7,500 aircraft had been built. "It was a very successful aircraft - Cessna copied the design with their 120 and 140 series," says DLAHF president Doug Combs.

"There are more than 2,500 aircraft flying today," he adds.

The Luscombe 8F will be aimed at training companies and private buyers. "Given the current lack of reasonably priced certified two-seat aircraft and the age of the existing fleet, we think the aircraft will be generally well received," says Renaissance.

The aircraft will be priced at between \$50,000 and \$70,000 and will be powered by either a Textron Lycoming O-320 or Czech-built 110kW (145hp) HP Walter M-32. "With the Lycoming, the aircraft will be capable of speeds of 125kt [235km/h], and with the Walter, around 105kt," says Combs. □

CMC completes preliminaries for Leopard business jet

CHICHESTER MILBS Consultants (CMC) has completed preliminary flight trials of its Leopard four-seat business jet.

The Williams FJX-1-powered aircraft, conceived in 1982, was tested for its handling and performance capabilities at speeds of around 260kt (485km/h). The aircraft was first flown in 1988 with Noel Penny turbojets, but has never gone into production.

The current flight-test programme is scheduled to resume on



CMC will accelerate its Leopard test programme

8 January, when CMC will attempt to expand the flight envelope to speeds of up to 430kt and altitudes of up to 35,000ft (10,600m). CMC

plans to replace the current engines with more-powerful Williams FJX-2 turboprops, expected to be flown in 2000. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ KUWAITI BUYS A319CJ

Kuwaiti conglomerate Mohamed Abdulmohsin Al Kharafi has become the first announced customer for the Airbus Corporate Jetliner. Powered by International Aero Engines V2527s, the A319CJ will be configured to carry 30 passengers.

■ EMS S-76C+ DELIVERED

AirEvac of Tulsa, Oklahoma, has taken delivery of the first Sikorsky S-76C+ configured for emergency-medical-service missions, which it operates on behalf of Hillcrest HealthCare System. The S-76C+ can carry two patient litters, or one litter and five medical attendants.

■ AIR METHODS FLIES FLAG

Air Methods has signed a three-year contract to provide helicopter medical-transport services for Arizona's Flagstaff Medical Center. Services will begin in February with a Bell 206L-3, until replaced by a 407, with a second helicopter available when needed.

■ SIGNATURE EXPANDS

Signature Flight Support has purchased Anchorage Air Center, at Alaska's Anchorage International Airport, to expand its chain of fixed-base operations, already the largest in the USA.

■ LANCAIR BOOKS 150TH

Lancair says that orders for its Columbia 300 piston-single have passed 150. US certification of the four-seat aircraft is scheduled for April, with first deliveries beginning in the second half of 1998.

■ CHALLENGER DEBUT

The Bombardier Challenger 604 business jet has made its Australian debut. The Canadian company displayed the twin-engined aircraft to major corporations and government agencies during a ten-day Australian tour.