

Production standstill forces Grob to reduce workforce

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AIRCRAFT production at Grob Aerospace's Mindelheim plant in Germany has ground to a halt through lack of orders, forcing the company to reduce its workforce to just over 40.

Grob says that up to 80 engineers have been transferred to its successful machine tool manufacturing operation, but can be recalled as necessary. Grob confirms that "...there is no production at the moment". The machine tool operation employs 1,800 in Mindelheim, and a total of 800 more in Brazil and the USA.

Grob Aerospace itself is being entirely subsidised by the machine tool business, although there is no indication yet that company owner Burkhard Grob has any intention of backing out of his composites aerospace business.

Aviation activities have been undertaken at Grob since 1971, since when more than 3,500 aircraft have been produced. The current family of production aircraft include the G109 light aircraft, the G115 military and commercial trainer. Development of the GF200 business aircraft and the Strato 2C high altitude research aircraft has stalled.

The best chance of getting back into large scale production lies with the best and final offer to the UK Ministry of Defence in May of a



Grob hopes aircraft in development such as the GF200 will revive output

proposal to use the G115 as a Royal Air Force lead-in trainer to replace the Scottish Aviation Bulldog. The competition is a straight fight with the locally built Slingsby Firefly.

Although it is known that the RAF prefers the G115 technically over Slingsby's original proposal, the contract is also a matter of survival for cash-strapped Slingsby, so the UK Government could be swayed in favour of a domestic manufacturer. Grob says it is in serious discussions with other air forces about the G115, and remains optimistic on further orders. At the same time, the com-

pany is carrying out feasibility studies on future projects, but declines to release details.

Grob had also been hoping to sell a licence for production of the GF200 tourist to a group of Mexican investors, although the long-running talks have failed to bear fruit so far.

The company has also failed to find an outside investor to allow it to continue the Strato 2C high altitude research aircraft programme, originally started for the German research and technology ministry, which finally withdrew its support on cost grounds. □

Lynton Group bids for Air Hanson

US GENERAL AVIATION company Lynton Group is in talks to acquire UK company Air Hanson. The aircraft charter and maintenance operation is being sold by its parent company, Hanson, as part of a wider restructuring.

If successful, the sale will be the third acquisition this year for the Morristown, New Jersey-based company. Most recently, Lynton acquired US fixed-base operator (FBO) JetSystems and London Luton Airport-based FBO Magec Aviation, formerly owned by defence electronics and power engineering company GEC.

Although no details of the possible sale have been released, Lynton - which also has operations at Denham in the UK - has secured agreement from Hanson for a 30-day exclusivity period, where no other bids will be considered. Lynton must decide by the end of the term whether it will proceed with the sale.

A decision is likely to be reached by the end of the month.

Camberley, Surrey-based Air Hanson, which owns a Raytheon BeechJet and two Sikorsky S-76s, would complement Lynton's fixed wing and helicopter business - which comprises three British Aerospace Hawker HS-125s, three Dassault Falcon 900Bs, four Eurocopter AS355 Twin Squirrels and one S-76, by broadening the spread of aircraft available.

Lynton continues to eye acquisitions worldwide and is looking at raising funds to support its investment and take-over plan. □

Objections threaten Moscow business airport

PLANS TO BUILD a business airport at Khodynka, near Moscow, have suffered a setback following objections from a government agency and strong public opposition to the project.

The airfield, 10km (6 miles) from the Russian capital, is surrounded by aircraft industry enterprises such as Ilyushin, the Sukhoi Design bureau and MAPO MIG. Three years ago, the project received the status of presidential programme, meaning that the spe-

cial programme office in Boris Yeltsin's administration was to supervise it. Promised Government financial guarantees on the \$12 million investment needed have failed to materialise because of Russia's financial situation.

The State Nuclear Inspection has also objected, as the airfield approach path passes over nuclear reactors at a nearby research institute. To overcome the objection, there is a plan to build a new runway with a slightly changed orientation.

The Khodynka project is in direct competition with another proposal, to build a business airport at Tushino, which is also close to the Russian capital.

The existing paved runway at Tushino is intended to be lengthened to allow aircraft such as the Ilyushin Il-114 and Yakovlev Yak-42 to land.

Moscow chief architect Alexander Kuzmin is reported to favour plans to establish a business airport at Tushino. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ NOT A TRACE

Trace Worldwide has sold its flight inspection business to its only UK rival, Flight Precision. Trace purchased the business last year as part of its acquisition of Hunting Aviation's Biggin Hill operations. Despite the sale, Trace says that it is discussing a tie-up with Flight Precision to exploit flight inspection opportunities worldwide.