



*TWA was the first airline to commit to the A318 (pictured here with original dorsal fin extension)*

# Cut and thrust

**After much deliberation, Airbus has launched its attack on the 100-seat market with a cut back, Pratt & Whitney PW6000-powered, A320 derivative**

MAX KINGSLEY-JONES/LONDON

**T**HE JOURNEY to Airbus Industrie's entry into the 100-seat market has been long and sometimes controversial. The consortium took its time studying the smaller end of the "big jet" market, and had planned an all-new collaborative programme with Asian companies, before finally adopting a derivative approach.

Until the launch of the 124-seat Airbus A319 in 1992, the 150-seat sector was the smallest category into which Airbus had dipped, with its hugely successful A320. In the early 1990s a move into the sub-150-seat sector was fraught with complications for Airbus as the consortium's partners were either actively participating in the market (British Aerospace and Daimler/Chrysler Aerospace - Dasa - through Fokker), and/or had advanced plans to enter it (Dasa with its MPC 75 and, later, with the Aerospatiale/Alenia consortium ATR on the Regioliner). There were also issues over where the smaller Airbus should be built - Toulouse, where the A320 was being assembled, or Hamburg, which had the A321 assembly line.

The issues were resolved, and the partners agreed to the launch of the A319 in May 1992, with production allocated to Dasa in Hamburg.

Seven frames shorter than the 150-seat A320, the A319 provided Airbus with a direct rival to the 737-300 (and now the similarly sized 737-700). While not providing a counter to Boeing's "baby" 737-500/600 (108 seats), the A319 nevertheless seemed to represent the natural lower branch of the A320 family tree.

During the early 1990s, the 80-120-seat regional aircraft sector was busy, with many developments and new aircraft planned. McDonnell Douglas doggedly pursued launch customers for its new technology DC-9 derivative, the 100-seat BMW Rolls-Royce-powered MD-95 (now the Boeing 717).

After a spate of re-organisation and rationalisation among the regional manufacturers, the only new project to emerge by the mid-1990s was the MD-95. Fokker was wound up in 1996 after continuing financial woes. The European regional manufacturing industry crystallised around the now defunct BAe/ATR consortium AI(R), which forged ahead to form a joint-venture company with the Chinese to produce an all-new regional aircraft. During 1996, Airbus Industrie Asia (AIA - a joint venture between Airbus and Italian AI(R) partner Alenia) was formed to take over from AI(R) at the European helm of the joint-venture programme.

## AE31X EMERGES

Full details of the \$2 billion programme, dubbed the AE31X, emerged in May 1997. The all-new twinjet family included two models, the 95-seat AE316 and 105-seat AE317, both powered by a new generation engine, with service entry slated for 2003. A consortium led by China's AVIC (46%), with AIA holding 39% and Singapore Technologies the remaining