

## FAA drops Mu-2 ice system requirement

THE US FEDERAL Aviation Administration has scaled back an icing airworthiness directive (AD) affecting the Mitsubishi Mu-2B twin-turboprop, by removing the requirement to fit an ice-detection system.

The decision dramatically reduces the cost of the AD to operators of Mu-2s, but the FAA says a group studying aircraft in the Mu-2's class may require installation of an ice-protection system.

The revised AD requires installation of systems for de-ice monitoring, automatic autopilot disconnection and trim-in-motion alerting, and auto-ignition engine relighting.

The FAA estimates the cost of compliance with the scaled-back AD at almost \$26,000. Addison, Texas-based Turbine Aircraft Services, which supports the Mu-2, says the pricing and availability of an AD compliance kit will be determined by the end of May. □

# Internet users given first chance to reserve Eclipses

GRAHAM WARWICK/WASHINGTON DC

ECLIPSE AVIATION will begin taking orders for its Eclipse 500 personal jet by the end of this month. People who have registered interest in the \$750,000 aircraft via Eclipse's website will get the first opportunity to reserve delivery positions, says chief executive Vern Raburn.

Details of a "fairly innovative" sales programme have yet to be revealed, but Raburn says deposits will become non-refundable when Eclipse provides performance and delivery guarantees at the Oshkosh show in late July.

The company, meanwhile, will move in mid-June to Albuquerque, New Mexico, initially occupying a former fixed-base operation at the

main airport before beginning construction of a final assembly facility at the city's Double Eagle II general aviation airport.

Eclipse has decided to build the first aircraft and begin flight testing in Albuquerque, rather than at Williams International in Detroit, as originally planned. Williams will continue to be responsible for design and certification of the Eclipse 500 and its EJ-22 engine, Raburn says.

Development of the 700lb thrust-class (3kN) EJ-22 is "in good shape", he says. Testing has "gone beyond full thrust", but specific fuel consumption has not met expectations. Another engine is being fabricated with "fairly significant" design changes to solve the problem, Raburn says.

The EJ-22 is the first production version of Williams' FJX-2 small turbofan, being developed under a cost-sharing contract with NASA. Raburn says plans to fly the FJX-2 at Oshkosh in Williams' V-Jet 2 demonstrator have been dropped.

"It did not push the programme forward," he says. Instead, the engine will fly late this year on a Boeing 727 testbed.

Eclipse, meanwhile, is about to begin its second round of financing, having secured an initial \$60 million from private investors including Microsoft chairman Bill Gates. Raburn continues to forecast that "more than \$300 million" will be needed to certify and begin production of the all-metal Eclipse 500. First deliveries are scheduled for 2003. □

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ■ BELL 407 IMPROVES

Several improvements have been certificated for the Bell 407 single-turbine helicopter, including an increased maximum take-off and landing altitude of 17,000ft (5,200m) and higher gross weights - 2,380kg (5,250lb) with internal payload and 2,725kg with external payload.

### ■ CIRRUS DOWN UNDER

Cirrus Design has certificated its SR20 in Australia, the first of several international approvals planned for the all-composite light aircraft. The first SR20 for Australia was delivered this month.

### ■ COMAIR OPENING

Comair Aviation has opened a new fixed-base operation at Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Airport to support growth of its Comair Jet Express corporate charter service and aircraft management business.

## Ferrari purchase boosts Avanti P180 profile

FERRARI HAS taken delivery of a Piaggio Aero Industries Avanti P180 turboprop in executive configuration. The twin engine business aircraft was handed over to the Italian car manufacturer and Formula One racing team on 18 May at Piaggio's Genoa Sestri's factory. The aircraft will become the

second P180 to appear on the Formula One circuit, joining an older model owned by Williams racing driver Ralf Schumacher. The high-profile sale to Ferrari, which is also a stakeholder in the aircraft company, should help to boost the executive P180 order-book. A further 11 Avantis are set for delivery this year.

## Aircraft will be relay systems

PLATFORMS International (Pictel) has secured the first customer for a system using aircraft to relay wireless voice and data communications.

Brazilian cellular telephone company Americal has signed a contract worth \$330 million for the 10-year lease of five Airborne Relay Communications (ARC) systems from Pictel.

The contract is conditional on a successful "beta" demonstration of the system in Brazil in the fourth quarter. This will involve a month-long trial of a production-standard ARC system installed in an aircraft operated by Pictel's Brazilian aviation partner, Aeromot Group.

Pictel chairman Bill Martin says the favoured aircraft for the beta demonstration is a Raytheon Beech King Air 200, although the Pilatus PC-12 is being considered, as is the Embraer EMB-120.

If the test is successful, the system will remain in place for use by Americal. □

