

# SkyWest clinches United deal

SKYWEST AIRLINES has concluded a new feeder agreement with United Airlines increasing its allocation of United Express regional jets to 55 aircraft, and clearing the way for the carrier to place the first 35 of a newly announced deal for up to 64 Bombardier CRJ200s.

The Utah-based carrier has increased its total CRJ200 commitment to 248 aircraft, of which 100 are on firm order. This latest CRJ200 purchase includes another 29 conditional orders, which it could put into service with its United Express or Delta Connection

operations, says Ron Reber, SkyWest chief operating officer.

SkyWest already has orders in hand for 66 CRJ200s, 16 having been delivered to date. The carrier plans to place 46 -200s with its Salt Lake City-based Delta operation. SkyWest's remaining 20 jets, of which two are in service, and the second tranche of 35 new aircraft, will operate as part of its Denver-based United Express arm.

SkyWest, like fellow Delta Connection operators Comair and Atlantic Southeast and Atlantic CoastJet, has opted for a mix of 40, 44- and 50-seat CRJ200s. While

the aircraft are structurally identical, Bombardier has had to cut the cost of the smaller capacity versions to compete with the Embraer ERJ-135, -140 and -145.

The Canadian manufacturer has accordingly capped the number of 40- and 44-seat CRJ200s to a percentage of the overall CRJ200 buy. "We know what the limit is, but have made no decision on the mix. It's a market issue and is United/Delta's call," says Reber.

Delivery of the new aircraft will run concurrently with the last order placed in 1999, with 18 entering service this year, 31 in

2002, 36 in 2003 and the remaining three in early 2004. The 29 conditional orders would follow, but a decision on a United or Delta configuration would need to be placed a year ahead of delivery.

SkyWest hopes to place the extra CRJ200s with United under the new scope clause agreement with the pilots union, which allows it to expand the number of regional jets as the mainline fleet grows. Reber also suggests a new scope clause agreement at Delta might allow SkyWest to add larger 70-seat jets and to switch some of its CRJ200 order to CRJ700s. □

## DoT backs off from competition code for entrant airlines

THE US DEPARTMENT OF Transportation has dropped plans to set a policy that would address unfair practices by major airlines operated against new entrant carriers. The move comes despite the outgoing Clinton Administration acknowledging that unfair competitive practices are a problem in the industry.

Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater says that informal DoT investigations show that some predatory-practice complaints appear valid, but he believes that the DoT should adopt a case-by-case approach.

Studies show that in some markets, dominant airlines respond to new competition with practices that are intended to, and will, eliminate that competition, he says, adding that the DoT should continue to work with the Justice Department which enforces antitrust laws.

Ed Faberman, head of the Air Carrier Association of America, which represents new entrants, says the issue must be addressed. "We are seeing unprecedented actions by the nation's largest carriers to further consolidate the airline industry and attempts by the nation's two largest carriers to divide and control markets." □

## Air France warns that it may abandon Concorde

DAVID LEARMOUNT/LONDON  
JULIAN MOXON/PARIS

IT IS NOT definite that Air France would resume Aerospatiale/British Aerospace Concorde commercial operations even if the aircraft's certificates of airworthiness were returned, according to the executive director general Pierre-Henri Gourgeon.

The surprise admission comes as Air France and British Airways revealed in detail, for the first time, the programme of modifications and tests designed to enable the Concorde fleet to enter service again. If everything goes perfectly, according to BA engineering technical and quality director Jim O'Sullivan, its operations would start "by late spring". O'Sullivan makes clear, however, that "no firm dates" have been set in case of unforeseen problems.

Gourgeon says it is "too early" to predict if and when commercial flights will resume. "That depends entirely on the certification authorities, which will take the data collected during the test programme, from which they will decide if the aircraft can be made airworthy or not". He adds "we hope to re-fly Concorde. But safety is our absolute priority."

Gourgeon, meanwhile, emphasises that Air France is playing its part in the rectification pro-



Concorde made its first Paris take-off since July, flying to Istres for tests

gramme and will be sharing the costs with aircraft manufacturer EADS. He explains: "At the moment our concern is to get the work done. We'll discuss costs later."

An Air France Concorde was ferried from Paris to Istres airfield on 18 January for ground tests.

The main modification makes the fuel tanks self-sealing in the event of rupture following a tyre explosion, such as that which happened in the Air France accident.

The fix consists of more than 100 sections of Kevlar/rubber tank lining formed to fit between inner wing ribs and over stringers in the lower wing, mainly forward and inboard of the engines, each made to fit a specific tank space.

Engineers will take up to 10

weeks to complete the work. BA estimates that fleet fitting and testing of this and other relatively minor modifications will cost £17 million (\$25 million). BA's planned cabin upgrade will add £14 million.

When BA's daily Concorde departures eventually re-start, says the airline, the airport will check the runway ahead of every take-off to ensure that there is no debris such as that which caused the fatal tyre explosion at Paris.

BA has no doubts about its passengers' keenness to fly. It has been keeping in close touch with regular Concorde travellers, who say their lives have been transformed by flights which take 8h instead of 3h. □

See Feature P34