

US helicopter fleets switch on to satellite communications

AN INCREASING number of AUS helicopter fleets are being equipped with satellite communications (satcom) for position reporting, flight following and two-way messaging. The OuterLink low-cost datalink capability, to be available worldwide by year-end, is particularly useful in regions with limited or no radar coverage.

Chevron has completed the installation of OuterLink satcom datalink units on its fleet of 29 helicopters operating in the Gulf of Mexico. As well as allowing automatic flight tracking and two-way messaging, the systems include a "Mayday" button and an automatic "missed-message alarm" indicating a loss of communication with the helicopter.

A second, unidentified petroleum industry operator has ordered 23 CP-2 satellite modems from OuterLink to equip its entire fleet.

The CP-2 L-band datalink is also popular with air medical operators. Air Evac has begun installations on 30 helicopters operating throughout the mid-west USA. Lebanon, New Hampshire-based Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and Duluth, Minnesota-based Life Flight both use the CP-2. □

PrivatAir expands globally with Ogden acquisitions

KATE SANSFIELD/LONDON

SWISS BUSINESS aircraft "airline" PrivatAir is expanding into the US market and strengthening its position in Europe after acquiring Ogden's Flight Services Group (FSG) in Connecticut and Transair at Paris Le Bourget airport.

The deals also mark the Geneva-based company's entry into the fixed based operator, ground handling and aircraft sales market.

Dave Kinson, PrivatAir's technical director says: "We have been planning to widen the range of services offered to our customers, whom we felt we lost control of once they stepped out of the aircraft." The company admits expanding its product range will spread the risk in the event of an economic downturn.

Kinson says: "FSG is among the largest providers of corporate aircraft management, executive charter and aircraft sales and ac-

quisitions in the USA, while Transair has a 35% share of air traffic handling at Le Bourget."

PrivatAir specialises in transporting VIPs, including government officials and heads of state, as well as providing tailored charter services such as promotional tours and product launches.

The company plans to adapt its services to the US market from where it also plans to broaden its operating base through joint ventures and further acquisitions.

PrivatAir operates six aircraft in total - three Boeing Business Jets, a Boeing 737-300, a 757 and a Gulfstream IV-SP, which has been dispatched to Connecticut to support the US operation. The 737-300 is expected to follow shortly.

Kinson admits further aircraft acquisitions are unlikely in the short term as FSG manages a growing fleet of 46 aircraft, of which 20 aircraft are available for charter. He says: "Our immediate plan is to renovate the Transair FBO. Work has begun on an FFR8 million [\$1.1 million] facelift due to be finished in June." □



PrivatAir heads to the USA, aiming to be a key business aviation company

Eagle hoping to land investors

ISRAEL'S DM Aerosafe is seeking investors for its Eagle vertical take-off and landing rescue platform, while US group PAM is continuing development of Individual Lifting Vehicle (ILV) prototypes.

The Eagle is being developed to rescue people beyond the reach of ladders in high-rise buildings, with the platform designed to land on the building or hover by windows, rescuing up to 10 people at a time, says David Metreveli, DM Aerosafe general manager.

Development would cost \$1 million annually over two years, says Metreveli. The company has failed to secure backing from Israeli investors and the government, however, forcing it to extend its search outside the country.

The two-level design has four wide-chord ducted fans attached to structural beams and driven by piston engines. A mock-up has been built, with the next stage being a scaled-down remote-controlled demonstrator. Metreveli says "once funding is secured" a sub-scale electric-powered flying model could be operating within months.

■ Virginia-based PAM's prototype one-man, rotor-based ILV is flying. Although currently powered by two two-cycle Hirth F-30 piston engines, a turbine engine is being considered for the PAM 100B. Applications include patrol duties, law enforcement and special military operations. The company is refining the design to enlarge the flight envelope. □

Jet credits offers 'alternative'

A NEW BUSINESS aircraft and helicopter leasing programme has been set up in the UK offering "an affordable alternative" to fractional ownership.

Operated by sales and charter company Canford Aviation, Jet Credits is aimed at wealthy individuals and small to medium-size companies, which "are either new to business jet and helicopter travel or need more flexibility than that offered by the scheme they are in", says Canford Aviation chief executive Nick Davis.

Aircraft from the European charter market are divided into four categories, based on cabin size - from an entry-level Cessna Citation Jet or Agusta A109 Power in group A to a widebody Airbus

A319 Corporate Jetliner, group D.

Clients buy occupied flying time in the form of jet credits "along similar lines to pre-paid mobile phones". Credits are sold in blocks of 10 costing £30,000 (\$44,000) paid directly into the customer's lawyer's account and then on to Canford. Davis adds: "We act as a broker for our customers, handling all their travel requirements. There are no capital outlays, no deposits, no binding contracts and no management or positioning fees."

The programme is based on occupied time in the air - one £3,000 jet credit per occupied hour in group A to five Jet Credits per hour in group D. Discounts of 37.5% are available for overnight, multi stage and day return flights. □