

## NEWS IN BRIEF

## ■ ALPHA ADDS PC-12

Alpha Flying, the only Pilatus PC-12 fractional ownership provider, has ordered its 10th aircraft, which is lined up for delivery in the fourth quarter. The Nashua, New Hampshire-based venture is expanding its PlaneSense fractional scheme throughout the USA.

## ■ BAVARIAN RETROFIT

The Bavarian police are outfitting their nine Pratt & Whitney Canada PW206B-powered Eurocopter EC135 helicopters with PW206B2 engines. This is the first engine retrofit programme for the EC135s and work will begin in September.

## ■ SAFIRE ORDERS

Safire Aircraft has received nearly 800 refundable deposits for its \$800,000 S-26 personal jet and claims to be on target for first flight in late 2002 and certification in 2003. The company is now seeking \$40 million investment to take the composite aircraft through to first flight.

## ■ CITATION INAUGURAL

Metro-xjet is planning to add by mid-June the first Cessna Citation VI available for charter on the UK register. The aircraft has been refurbished. Metro-xjet also operates a 550-series Citation and plans to add further aircraft to its managed fleet over the next 18 months.

## ■ SPORT PILOT

The US Federal Aviation Administration has signed off the Sport Pilot/Light Aircraft proposal, according to recreation aviation body the Experimental Aircraft Association. The new category is designed to simplify and slash the cost of aircraft ownership and flying. The rule applies to two-seat aircraft with a maximum gross weight of 560kg (1,232lb) flying visual flight rules only.

# PrivatAir will use fixed-base operation to expand in USA

KATE SANSFIELD/LONDON

**B**USINESS AVIATION service provider PrivatAir is aiming to establish a network of fixed-base operations (FBO) throughout the USA and Europe to strengthen its private airline brand.

The Geneva, Switzerland-based operator entered the aircraft handling and management market for the first time earlier this year when it acquired Ogdens Flight Services Group (FSG) in Connecticut and Transair at Paris Le Bourget airport. Dave Kinson, PrivatAir's commercial director, says: "We are now in the process of rebranding and integrating our new companies. While work on the Transair facility should be complete by the end of the year we are expecting rebranding of the FSG network [with 17 locations] to be complete by the end of the first quarter."

FSG's Bridgeport, Connecticut,

base will provide the initial focus for PrivatAir's entry into the FBO market, and should be established by the middle of next year. The acquisition of FSG gives PrivatAir access to a fleet of around 20 managed aircraft throughout the USA, enabling the company to expand its charter network.

PrivatAir's fleet consists of six aircraft – three Boeing Business Jets (BBJs), a Boeing 757, a Boeing 737-300 and a Gulfstream IV-SP. The last two have been dispatched to Bridgeport to support the US operation. Further aircraft acquisitions are unlikely in the short term, the company says.

PrivatAir concedes, however, that penetration of the US market will be difficult as both its name and the private airline concept are not well known in the region. Kinson adds: "We hope to change the US industry's negative perception of charter. The PrivatAir brand offers

customers exclusivity and a level of service luxury not normally associated with this form of travel."

The Swiss company is also seeking to expand its private terminal concept in Europe and the USA, based on its Geneva airport facility set for completion by the end of the year. "Our aim is to promote the use of business aircraft and make this method of travel very appealing," says Kinson. By establishing dedicated business aircraft terminals globally, and through the formation of value-added products such as limousine travel, PrivatAir believes it can gain control of passengers' whole travel experience.

Meanwhile, PrivatAir is continuing negotiations with two London businesses to launch five-day-a-week transatlantic shuttles between London and New York Kennedy, using two of its three BBJs (*Flight International*, 24-30 April). □

## CHC clinches crew change contract



CHC HELICOPTER Service has clinched a five-year renewal contract from Norsk Hydro, Norsk Shell and Statoil to provide offshore crew change operations from its Kristiansund base in Norway. Under the terms of the three-year contract, valued at NOK160 million (\$17.4 million) annually, up from NOK110 million a year under its previous contract, CHC will deploy three Eurocopter Super Pumas supporting Draugen, Heidrun, Njord and Asgard oil fields in the North Sea, as well as exploration rigs in the region. The deal is the second major signing between Statoil and CHC. On 1 May the companies extended an annual NOK25 million contract to provide offshore support from Bronnoysund, Norway, with a Super Puma.

## Gulfstream GV-SP nears completion

**G**ULFSTREAM IS nearing completion of its GV-SP prototype and plans to begin flight tests in the fourth quarter of the year. The prototype, a modified GV, is the first of three test aircraft. According to Gulfstream, the first fully conforming GV-SP will fly by the middle of next year with the aircraft certified late next year. The first GV-SP is to be scheduled for service entry in late 2003.

The \$45 million GV-SP – a derivative of the GV which it will replace around the 200th aircraft – has increased cabin space, aerodynamic and engine upgrades and a range increase at Mach 0.8 of 460km (250nm) to 12,490km.

Gulfstream says GV-SP orders now exceed 40 aircraft, including a 20-strong launch order from Executive Jet for its NetJets fractional ownership programme. □