



## Winner

Jürgen Thomas, Airbus

**J**ürgen Thomas is likely to be remembered in future years as the "father of the A380", just as Joe Sutter is associated with the Boeing 747. Without Thomas and his determination and persistence, the Airbus A380 would not have been launched and Airbus would not have more than 60 orders for the ultra-large aircraft and be moving ahead with its development. Leipzig, Germany-born Thomas started his civil aviation career in 1962 following graduation from Munich's Technical University, where he specialised in mechanical engineering, fluid dynamics and aerodynamics. He joined Munich-based Vereinigte Flugtechnische-Werke (VFW – now part of EADS Airbus) in 1965 where he was project manager for future civil transport aircraft.

He first worked for Airbus Industrie in Toulouse in 1976 when he was appointed chief engineer for the A310, rising to become A300/A310 programme manager. Between 1984 and 1988 he was senior vice-president industrial and programmes for the consortium, after which he left the European manufacturer for MBB (then part of DASA) to be managing director of MBB's 100-seat MPC aircraft project. By 1991, he was responsible for all of DASA's regional aircraft activities. He became executive vice-president of the company's engineering design and technology division in 1992 and from 1993 to 1995 he was also the European project director for the American-European Very Large Commercial Transport.

Thomas continued his involvement in large aircraft development from March 1996 when he returned to Airbus as senior vice-president of the manufacturer's newly formed Large Aircraft Division. In this position he took responsibility for all activities relating to the development of the 555-seat A3XX airliner.

Thomas is considered by the manufacturer to be the "single main driving force" behind the A3XX, now known as the A380. He played a key role in the programme even before the aircraft had a name, at a time when many in the industry considered that such an ultra-large aircraft would never fly. In order to achieve project launch and to confound the sceptics within Airbus itself, Thomas gathered a single, united and multi-disciplinary team from the Airbus partners. He took a hands-on approach, which ensured a higher level of maturity, at the pre-launch phase than on any previous aircraft programme.

By January 2000, Thomas and his team were required to show that the pre-development work was complete and the project could progress to industrial launch. A number of airlines were so convinced that the A380 would meet their needs that they started announcing plans to purchase the aircraft before the manufacturer had even obtained authorisation to offer. That milestone was achieved in June 2000, and by year-end sufficient orders had been booked to launch the programme. "This achievement – a landmark in the history of aviation – can be largely attributed to the man whose ingenuity, commitment and steadfast conviction stimulated others to surpass themselves," according to Airbus.

Thomas was the clear winner in this category. The judges felt that his "drive and determination" to see the A380 launched – "one of the most important issues in aviation this year" – should be recognised. "He has been swimming upstream for two years with many saying the project would never launch or be a financial success," said one judge.

Since the beginning of this year Thomas has been special advisor to Airbus chief executive officer Noel Forgeard. He is also a member of the Airbus Executive Committee. The A380 is set to fly in 2004.

