

AIR TRANSPORT PAUL LEWIS / WASHINGTON DC

# CFM56 takes pole position on A318

Customers negotiate delivery and engine changes

Airbus and Pratt & Whitney are in intensive talks with their A318 customers over delivery dates and engine selection, following continuing problems with the performance of the twinjet's PW6000, originally designated the launch powerplant.

The CFM56-5 will now become lead powerplant on the A318 programme, and the airframe builder has been forced to start a major overhaul of the programme to cater for PW6000 problems. Flight testing of the 107-seat aircraft got under way on 15 January.

Certification of the PW6000-powered version, originally due in early 2003, will now be delayed by at least a year, and the CFM International CFM56-powered model becomes the lead variant in the programme. The first CFM56-powered A318 is due for delivery to Air France in September 2003.

The delay has affected several customers, including America West, British Airways, Frontier Airlines, and International Lease Finance (ILFC), which were due to take PW6000-powered aircraft next year. Although the delay will help some customers trying to defer aircraft, it is not clear if P&W will escape paying compensation for A318s not delivered within the contract schedule.

ILFC confirms it is in the process of renegotiating its order in the wake of the PW6000 delays. "We're in talks with Airbus on that and we're also in active discussions with P&W and CFM as well," says ILFC president John Plugger. "What's driving the decision is not deliveries but the overall technical outcome of the the PW6000 and whether to switch to the CFM56."

According to industry sources, ILFC is considering switching some or all of its order from the PW6000 engine to the competing CFM56-5. ILFC at the same time has renegotiated its A318 order, and reduced the total by 10 aircraft to 20. As a result of this, and the cancella-

tion of the GATX/Flightlease order for 12 A318s, the orderbook has fallen by 22 aircraft to 114.

Frontier Airlines is also having to reconsider its plans, having ordered five aircraft, three of which were due for delivery during 2003. In addition, it planned to lease an A318 from ILFC from February 2003. Frontier, unlike many A318 customers, is in urgent need of additional lift and cannot afford to delay deliveries.

P&W, in co-ordination with ILFC, is trying to provide Frontier with interim capacity, possibly in the form of the larger A319. The Denver-based carrier's only alternative is to switch to CFM56-powered A318s and delay delivery of its first three aircraft.

Airbus plans a 900h flight-test programme for the A318. Prior to the delay, the bulk of testing was due to be flown by two PW6000-powered aircraft with the CFM56-powered version carrying out just 150h. According to the manufacturer, the first flight of the CFM56-powered A318 has been brought forward to the end of October this year. Previously, the second PW6000-powered A318 was due to undertake 300h of flight-test and then be re-engined to become the first CFM56-equipped model.

Around 300h of the 750h allocated to the PW6000-powered model has shifted to the CFM56 version. The A318's version of the CFM56-5 is set for certification by June.

P&W does not plan to take a decision on changing or modifying the PW6000 high pressure compressor until April. The engine manufacturer faces a choice between adding additional stages to the current high pressure compressor or switching to the six stage HDV12 offered by MTU (*Flight International*, 18-31 December 2001). Either way it could be 2004 before a performance guarantee conforming engine is ready.

**ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY MAX KINGSLEY-JONES IN PARIS**

## Briefing

### FLS and Sikorsky in 767 conversion talks

**OFFSET** FLS Aerospace is negotiating with US helicopter manufacturer Sikorsky a \$130 million contract to convert at least 12 Boeing 767 passenger aircraft into freighters over the next five years. The offset work follows the Irish government's purchase of three Sikorsky S-92 helicopters for search and rescue. It has taken an option for two S-92s for the military utility role. The Danish-owned maintenance company said it was not in a position to reveal the origin of the aircraft or the customer for the deal. The Irish Air Corps' selection of the S-92 is the first military order for the machine.

### Europe sharpens bomber focus

**EUROPEAN BOMBER** A potential European need to develop a new bomber is slowly being brought into focus after the intensive use of the Boeing B-52 and other US Air Force strategic bombers in the Afghan conflict. Noel Forgeard, Airbus chief executive, says: "When one sees the importance of the B-52 in Afghanistan it underlines the fact that Europe does not have such a weapon. We could make some effort of imagination to see if an Airbus platform could be used." Philippe Camus, co-chief executive of EADS, one of Airbus's two principal shareholders, says he is thinking along similar lines. Both stress that "it's a concept, not a project," for now.

### New chief for satellite joint venture

**RESTRUCTURE** Astrium shareholders BAE Systems and EADS have replaced the chief executive of their satellite joint venture Astrium. The new head, Antoine Bouvier, has been given three months to present a cost-cutting plan, after the business lost heavily in 2001. In a separate restructuring, BAE Systems has appointed Mark Ronald as chief operating officer (COO) responsible for its North America business. He joins two other COOs reporting to chief executive John Weston. Sir Charles Masefield becomes vice chairman with Mike Rouse reporting to him as new group marketing director.

### South Korean fighter bids too high

**COMPETITION** A second round of bidding in South Korea's F-X fighter competition has been set for 24 January after none of the contenders matched the defence ministry's target price during the initial round on 14 January. Boeing, Dassault, Eurofighter and Sukhoi are vying for the \$3 billion, 40-aircraft deal, offering the F-15K, Rafale, Typhoon and Su-35 respectively. The South Korean government aims to finish price negotiations by the end of this month ahead of a final selection by March.

### Honeywell to supply FMS for A380

**FLIGHT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS** Honeywell will supply the flight management system (FMS) for the Airbus A380. Honeywell, which beat a Thales/Smiths Aerospace team for the contract, estimates \$200 million revenues from the business over a 15-year period. The FMS for the A380 will be based on Honeywell's Pegasus system, but will incorporate new hardware to provide greater speed and memory, and a new graphical user interface. Certification is due in 2005 to meet A380 deliveries in 2006.

### Low-cost BMI Baby is born

**LOW-COST AIRLINES** BMI British Midland has launched a low-cost airline, BMI Baby, based at its East Midlands base outside Derby, UK. BMI Baby will inherit two 148-seat Boeing 737-300s from its parent and fly to France, Portugal and Spain from 23 March. The carrier is seen as a response to rival Go's decision to use East Midlands as its third UK base.

### ANA seeks to block Japanese merger

**COMPETITION** All Nippon Airways has formally objected to the proposed merger of Japan Airlines and Japan Air System. The carrier argues that the enlarged carrier would have a dominant position over domestic trunk services as well as on international flights. The Japanese competition authority is set to rule on the proposed merger in the first half of this year.