

EXPANSION JUSTIN WASTNAGE / STANS, SWITZERLAND

Pilatus ponders additions to civilian aircraft offering

Swiss firm could produce alternative versions of PC-12 after its success in US market

Pilatus is looking into expanding its civil range after the success of its PC-12 single-engined turboprop in the USA. The Swiss manufacturer is in the early stages of new programme development, which could include a jet-engined or twin turboprop version of the aircraft.

Ignaz Gretenner, Pilatus's vice-president for general aviation, says any new development is "several years off" as the company, based in Stans, near Lucerne, is focusing research and development on its new military trainer, the PC-21.

The PC-12 was developed using PC-7 profits and the original business plan is based on a break-even target of 500 aircraft delivered

before any new civilian model is launched.

Gretenner says that, although traditional thinking at Pilatus is that a twin constitutes "one engine too many", a twin PC-12, possibly designated the PC-16, is one of many options under consideration. A major hurdle for the PC-12 is the continuing ban on single-engine commercial operations under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) in European Joint Aviation Authorities member states. Georg Langhans, regional sales manager for the PC-12 in Europe, says if IFR single-engine operations were allowed, the market for the PC-12 could double in Europe.

A jet-powered version is also being considered in response to demand from operators in remote US locations. Pilatus says future development is more likely to refine the fuel efficiency and range of the present design and would retain the large rear cargo door.

■ Pilatus delivered the last of six PC-12s to the central division of the Royal Australian Flying Doctor Service last week. The division, covering South Australia and the southern half of the Northern Territory, now has nine PC-12s. The Flying Doctor programme is the largest operator of the aircraft; four others work in Western Australia and three in Queensland.

TILTROTOR

BA609 on test

The first prototype Bell/Agusta BA609 tiltrotor could fly as early as this summer following ground run tests due to begin in April, says the US-Italian joint venture. The BA609, which was developed from technology from the Bell Boeing V22 Osprey, is being prepared for the tests at Bell's Arlington, Texas, research centre, where powerplants, hydraulics and electrical systems will be tested.



KITPLANES

AeroComp eight-seat jet in pipeline

AeroComp, the US kitplane manufacturer, has confirmed its plans to develop an eight-seat jet. The single-engine, all-composite Comp Air Jet (CA-J) will be available as a kit only, but the company plans to set up a builder assistance centre.

AeroComp co-owner Steve Young says the CA-J will be powered by a factory-remanufactured Ivchenko AI-25, a 3,400lb (15kN)-thrust turbofan also used on the Aero Vodochody L-39 Albatros jet trainer and Yakovlev Yak-40 air-

liner. The company plans to establish a US service centre for the Russian engine, but the aircraft could also accommodate a Pratt & Whitney JT12-8 or General Electric CJ610 turbojet.

The carbonfibre-composite CA-J will have a maximum take-off weight of 4,000kg (8,810lb) and a useful load of about 2,000kg, giving it a range of around 1,800km (1,000nm) with full fuel and six occupants. Pressurisation will provide a 10,000ft (3,000m) cabin alti-

tude at the aircraft's 29,900ft service ceiling. Designed for moderately experienced pilots, the CA-J's performance will be "reasonable", including a cruise speed of just over 350kt (640km/h) and an approach speed of just under 100kt.

AeroComp expects to fly a prototype by the end of the third quarter and begin kit deliveries next year. Projected cost of the kit is \$350,000 including engine. Completion should take six to nine months, with a maximum cost of \$600,000.

CHC CONTRACTS

CHC Helicopters has taken delivery of a 12th Eurocopter AS32L2 Super Puma MkII to a 30-month North Sea support contract for Kerr-McGee Chemicals from its UK subsidiary CHC Scotia. CHC Ireland has won a five-year contract, starting in July, for 24h search-and-rescue operations in south-east Ireland using a Sikorsky S-61. CHC now has three Irish coastguard contracts.

TAG GROWS

TAG Aviation added nine aircraft to its charter management fleet in January, including a Cessna Citation Excel and a Dassault Falcon 900EX, based in the UK.

FLEET CHANGE

US small-package carrier AirNet Systems has retired five piston-twins and added three Bombardier Learjets and three Cessna Caravans to its fleet. Columbus, Ohio-based AirNet is expanding into on-demand cargo and passenger charter to increase aircraft utilisation.

NORDAM TALKS OFF

Nordam Group has called off negotiations to form the Bomhoff-Nordam business aircraft cabinetry venture, after failing to agree financial terms. Instead, Nordam will accelerate expansion of interior manufacturing in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

DISPLAY UPGRADE

UPS Aviation Technologies has added a traffic capability to its MX20 multifunction display. The system has been upgraded to show targets from the Goodrich SkyWatch and Ryan traffic collision-avoidance systems.

INTERLAKEN CAT III

Interlaken Capital Aviation Services has received the CAT III operational qualification on the Dassault Falcon 900EX equipped with the Rockwell Collins Flight Dynamics head-up guidance system. It is the first US Federal Aviation Administration FAR part 135 operator to do so. Marc Vallé, Dassault Falcon Jet's vice president of programmes, says this will enable Interlaken to pursue CAT II qualification for Type I airports.