

BERLIN AIMS HIGH

Germany's ILA wants to shrug off its regional air show tag and take its place alongside the trade fair giants

JUSTIN WASTNAGE / BERLIN

German aerospace has lofty ambitions for the International Aerospace Exhibition (ILA) 2002, the Berlin air show. BDLI, the German aerospace industries association, predicts this year's event, to be held at Berlin Schönefeld Airport on 6-12 May, it will shed its regional air show label, and move into the mainstream of international trade fairs, alongside Paris, Farnborough, Singapore and Dubai.

Since returning to Berlin from Hanover in 1998, the show has doubled in exhibitor and attendance numbers, and organisers are confident of attracting more than 1,000 exhibitors this year. European aerospace giant EADS is promoting Berlin behind the scenes as it considers ILA to be one of its two "home shows". It will dominate the exhibition from a pavilion of equal size to the one it had at Paris last year.

Rainer Hertlich, BDLI president and co-chief executive of EADS, says ILA is one of Europe's "big three" air shows. "After Paris," he says, "Farnborough and Berlin are fighting for number two slot." In 2000, ILA attracted 941 exhibitors, up from 825 in 1998. Farnborough had 1,287 exhibitors in the same year – but last year's Paris show beat them both, with 1,895, despite being down on previous years due to a slowing US economy. The number of pavilions at Berlin has been increased from five to six, and there is evidence that the air show is starting to be taken more seriously than in previous years.

Competition between the three shows is fierce, and Farnborough was accused of spoiling tactics when in 2000 the UK show organiser rescheduled its event from September to July, forcing ILA to move to May. In fact, the decision was taken to bring the UK show into a better cycle with Paris, says the organiser, the Society of British Aerospace Companies (SBAC). June was impossible, due to concerns from local school authorities, but July is also far from

perfect, as many continental European companies are winding down ahead of month-long manufacturing breaks in August. In 2000-01, all three European air shows took place virtually within a year, with fewer and fewer major announcements being spread around the shows. Many industry commentators have argued that the show calendar needs restructuring.

Hertlich says: "The USA needs to have one big air show every two years, and the European shows should rotate on alternate years". Despite hinting a change may come as early as 2006, he says the SBAC is less "open minded" towards the idea. GIFAS, BDLI's French counterpart, says it is unaware of any such change, and polls by the USA's Aerospace Industries Association show that US aerospace companies prefer smaller, more "direct" feel of several specialised shows.

As European industry restructures, it cannot be long before the feasibility of two large shows in one year is questioned. There has also been talk of the European shows alternating on a three-year basis. Both these plans rely on Berlin being seen as an equal to Farnborough and Paris, so the BDLI is aiming to improve the show's image and exploiting sectors it believes are "neglected" by "defence-heavy" Farnborough.

ILA organisers have also been working to

address logistical problems encountered by delegates in 2000. Improved transport links to Schönefeld should ensure no visitors are stuck at the railway station, and the introduction of a separate air corridor for helicopters is designed to avoid the situation at ILA 2000, when Eurocopter complained that its VIP flights were being held in the same air traffic pattern as the display flights.

Expansion plans

The development of Schönefeld is central to ILA's expansion plans, says Hans Eberhard Birke, BDLI director general. Following the collapse of communism, the former East Berlin airport, which plans to rename itself Berlin Brandenburg International Airport in 2007, has become home to charter operators and low-cost carriers. Airport authorities have attracted the air show to the location with preferential rates, and, in return, hope to showcase their new facilities, including a new terminal and a 4,000m (13,100ft) runway.

Many view orders announced to be the test of an air show's success. ILA 2000 saw companies revealing orders worth over \$25 billion. General Electric Capital Aviation Services, for instance, announced over \$11 billion worth of orders and options for 450 Bombardier, Embraer and Fairchild Dornier regional jets. This eclipsed Paris's poor year in 2001, with only 309 aircraft orders worth \$17.3 billion, of which International Lease Finance's deal with Airbus accounted for \$8.7 billion. Farnborough 2000, however, saw a record year, with orders worth \$42 billion. In the current climate, estimates for ILA remain muted, with Fairchild Dornier most likely to announce new customers for its 728 regional jet. The manufacturer may be in more of a hurry to conclude any deal with possible suitors before the show, however.

The show will not see the debut of the Fairchild Dornier aircraft; the main premiere will now be the Airbus A318. But there is unlikely to be any significant Airbus commercial aircraft announcement, possibly reflecting the political pressures behind the EADS-BAE Systems joint venture. Although Airbus's supervisory board met at ILA 2000, it was another few days until the final points of the Airbus A380 programme were resolved and the project launched.

Similarly, ILA 2002 will be trying to avoid a repeat of the disappointment it faced when a planned deal between French, Dutch, German and Italian governments with NH Industries for the NH90 helicopter was delayed by several weeks. A European Union defence ministers' council is planned for the show and, given that the German parliament recently gave authorisation for initial Airbus Military Company (AMC) A400M funding, the mil-

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1,000
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