

SAFETY

Engineer dies in AB139 crash

A Bell Agusta Aerospace AB139 helicopter crashed last week during a test flight near Rimini, Italy, killing the chief test engineer and injuring the pilot.

Eyewitnesses report that the aircraft lost power before the two pilots bailed out. The Italian air safety board says the engineer's parachute was caught in the blades.

The incident is being investigated by Italian officials. Further test flights have been cancelled. The aircraft took off from the Italian air force base at Rimini, 80km (43nm) from Bologna in northern Italy, at around 10.25 and flew for 20min before crashing at Monteleone, 20km north west of Rimini.

Agusta uses the base for test flights due to the diversity of terrain in the surrounding area. The company is unable to comment on the cause of the crash until release of the preliminary results of the investigation. According to Italian press reports, the helicopter was performing auto-rotation manoeuvres at an altitude of around 6,000ft (1,830m) at the time of the accident.

PRODUCTION GRAHAM WARWICK / WASHINGTON DC

Cessna set to cut Citation production for next year

Manufacturer to slash year-on-year tally by one-sixth as upturn bids its time

Cessna is to cut Citation business jet production to 250 aircraft in 2003, from 300 this year, despite a slight market recovery. Gulfstream, meanwhile, is holding on to \$51 million in downpayments from Avolar until it can find new buyers for aircraft ordered by the defunct fractional-ownership company.

Cessna parent company Textron says the 33 net business-jet orders booked in the first quarter keep the manufacturer on track for a full-year total of 120 aircraft. Including the backlog of 140 orders for 2003 delivery, this is enough to sustain production of 250 aircraft next year. Cessna has cut production after delivering 313 Citations last year.

"We saw a rebound in the first quarter, but not sufficient to impact production," Textron says. The reduction will mainly be in production of the entry-level Citation CJ1 and CJ2, which will account for 35 of the 50-aircraft cut next year. The company says there will be almost no reduction in the planned pro-

duction of super mid-size Citation Xs. As a result of the higher mix of larger aircraft, Cessna is expected to maintain its profitability next year.

Gulfstream has no production cuts planned despite the cancellation of firm orders for 36 aircraft for United Airlines' Avolar subsidiary. The manufacturer is confident it can resell the six aircraft due for delivery this year, but parent company General Dynamics says it will not return the \$51 million in deposits until the Avolar aircraft are sold. "If we remarket the aircraft successfully, the contractual dispute will go away," the company says.

Gulfstream saw signs of market recovery in the first quarter, and says less than 20% of production planned for this year, "including the Avolar aircraft", is still for sale, down from 30% at the start of the year. "We are just beginning to see the Fortune 500 firms getting off the bench," the company says.

The demise of Avolar has reduced Gulfstream's total backlog by

\$2.5 billion to \$6.4 billion, and its firm backlog by \$800 million to \$4.5 billion. Executive Jet's NetJets fractional-ownership programme represents 43% of the firm's funded backlog, against 48% for other commercial customers and 9% for government buyers. Executive Jet exercised options for additional aircraft in the first quarter, says Gulfstream.

Raytheon Aircraft saw orders improve in the first quarter. Bookings were boosted by the merger of its Travel Air fractional-ownership subsidiary with Flight Options, which resulted in its order for 115 business jets, worth \$900 million, being added to the firm orderbook. But even without the boost, orders for Beechjets, Hawkers, King Airs and pistons rose to 36 in the first quarter from 11 in the same period last year.

Directory call For inclusion in the *Flight International 2002 Corporate Aircraft Directory*, contact David Reynolds at *Air Transport Intelligence* on Tel: +44 20 8652 3659; Fax: +44 20 8652 3898; E-mail: atidata@rati.

IN BRIEF

Y12E PROPELLER

Hartzell's four-bladed lightweight propeller has been selected for the Chinese Hafai Y12E turboprop. The Y12E, certificated in China last year, is undergoing further flight tests.

PIPER SALES

Meridian Aviation has taken over New Piper aircraft sales in Ireland, Spain and the UK. The Channel Islands-based firm took over Anglo American Automotive's assets.

GLOBAL EXPRESS

The Air Group of New York is marketing a Bombardier Global Express long-range business jet – the second Global Express available for charter in the USA.

DELIVERIES

Dash 8s have got the power

Canadian hydro-electric giant Hydro-Québec has introduced a Bombardier Dash 8 Q400 to shuttle employees between Montreal and airfields serving five electricity-generating sites in northern Quebec. The firm will take delivery of a second Q400 soon. The aircraft will join two Dash 8-300s, replacing an ageing fleet of four Convair 580 turboprops that have been in shuttle service for 20 years. The new Dash 8s are certificated for gravel runway work, and Hydro-Québec will be the first operator to make use of this capability with the Q400.



NEW SITES

Jet Aviation opens in UK

Jet Aviation has opened its first UK maintenance and fixed-base operation (FBO), at Biggin Hill airport, 20km (14 miles) from central London.

The Swiss company invested £3 million (\$4.2 million) in refurbishing the 5,200m² (54,000ft²) facility, previously owned by Hunting Aviation. The company hopes to attract many of the 300 UK-registered business aircraft.

The firm says it plans to open an FBO in Dubai next year. Meanwhile, its Bedford, Massachusetts, facility has been named an authorised service centre for the Raytheon Premier I business jet.