

FREIGHTERS

IAI courts Gulfstream for Airtruck

Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) is trying to convince Gulfstream to help its stalled Airtruck turbo-prop freighter as it attempts to resurrect the programme.

The US business jet manufacturer confirms talks were held with IAI about joining the programme, but says that these have now ended. "We discussed the Airtruck with IAI, but we've told them we're not interested." But sources at both companies say discussions are continuing.

Gulfstream already has links to IAI through its parent General Dynamics' acquisition last year of Galaxy Aerospace – the IAI joint venture with the Pritzker family, which marketed the Israeli manufacturer's Astra SPX and Galaxy business jets.

Although FedEx Express needed over 100 Airtrucks, it is unclear whether it is still eyeing the type.

The programme has been stalled as IAI searches for more potential customers and partners to ensure a large production run to lower unit cost.

FLEET EXPANSION IAN GOOLD / BEIRUT

Oman Air eyes widebody buy as it expands network

Gulf carrier to return leased aircraft as it considers move to boost capacity

Oman Air is looking to add widebodies to its fledgling fleet, as it continues to rationalise operations.

The Gulf carrier's chief executive Abdul Rahman Al Busaidy says the company wants to acquire up to three new widebody twinjets – either the Airbus A330 or the Boeing 767-300ER. The additional capacity is required before year-end to serve routes to Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and London.

Al Busaidy says the airline expects to return its single Boeing 737-400 to lessor International Lease Finance (ILFC) this month, following the return of its last Airbus A310-300 to ILFC, and its three remaining Fokker F27s being put into storage.

By August, following deliveries currently under way, the airline will have three 124-seat Boeing 737-700s and two 166-passenger

-800s, with a further 737-800 scheduled to arrive next year. The airline also operates four ATR 42-500s, of which three are dedicated to a Petroleum Development Oman service contract.

Al Busaidy says that new routes being introduced this summer include Beirut, Lebanon; Cairo, Egypt; Karachi, Pakistan; and Colombo, Sri Lanka, as well as Mombasa, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar, Tanzania.

Bahrain is also under consideration, as the only Gulf Co-operation Council state not in Oman Air's network, and a principal hub for cash-strapped Gulf Air, the international carrier in which the Oman government has a 25% share, along with the governments of Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, and Qatar. At the beginning of this month, Oman and Qatar missed a deadline by which the partner governments had been due to commit to a new cash injection for Gulf Air.



As its last A310 heads back to ILFC, Oman Air is seeking new widebodies

WORKSHOP

■ **GE Engine Services** is to maintain CF6-80A engines powering **FedEx Express's** fleet of 31 Airbus A310 freighters under a 20-year per-cycle maintenance agreement. ■ **Boeing** has completed the modification of eight of 15 new 737-800s from American Airlines to **Qantas Airways** configuration following the Australian airline's order last December, and is offering similar packages to other airlines and leasing companies. ■ **FLS Aerospace** has been contracted by **Volare Airlines** to provide light and line maintenance, and technical services for the Italian carrier's six Airbus A330s. FLS has also won a five year contract worth €20 million (\$18,200) from **Virgin Atlantic** for maintenance of the airline's Airbus A340 fleet.

STATE AID

MEPs: states should fund security

The European Parliament has recommended for the second time that governments should not only require improved pan-European aviation security standards, but also pay for them.

But the industry fears European Union member states will reject any such proposal at their forthcoming Council of Transport Ministers meeting in Luxembourg on 17-18 June.

Airports Council International (ACI) Europe director general Philippe Hamon points to the disadvantage that European carriers face in competing with their transatlantic counterparts.

He says the US government will pump \$1.5 billion for 2002-03 into providing airport security equipment newly required by law, and is

taking over as trainer and employer of security screening personnel. The US move came in the wake of 11 September.

Hamon says: "Many EU governments still refuse to do their duty to protect their citizens at airports and on board aircraft. This must not be allowed to continue." But the UK transport ministry says that at the EU Council it will vote against any move for states to fund airline security, stating that the user should pay.

More likely to be approved are European Parliament amendments to its civil aviation security legislation. ACI Europe says: "After recent events, we believe it's time to establish a unified system at government level, using all tools at European governments' disposal."

Meanwhile, Latin American airlines are challenging actions by the USA and their own governments since 11 September, claiming that they are being hit simultaneously by higher taxes and lower demand.

Airline chief executive officers speaking at last week's AvNews International Airline CEO conference in Miami said that increasing security costs and more restrictive regulations, which have been imposed by the USA, have placed a heavier financial burden on the already struggling Latin American aviation sector.

Latin American airlines have been threatened with fines and increased landing fees if they fail to comply with the more stringent US passenger manifest information requirements.