

READY TO SERVE

The four partner air forces set to receive the first Eurofighters later this year have been busy preparing their support teams for the big day

STEWART PENNEY / WARTON & MUNICH

Later this year the Eurofighter programme will reach a major milestone with the handover of the first aircraft to the UK Royal Air Force for the start of operational training. The German, Italian and Spanish air forces will receive their first multirole fighters shortly after the RAF.

Although the Eurofighter by the end of this year will still be some way from operational service, the four partner air forces will at last have their long-awaited aircraft and will be on course to declare the multirole Eurofighter operational in 2006.

Each of the air forces will first operate the aircraft from their national Eurofighter partner company bases. Initial German air force Eurofighters will be stationed at Manching in Bavaria, the EADS Germany final assembly site and home to the German national test centre, WTD61. Italian aircraft will begin operations from Alenia's Caselle plant near Turin; Spain's fighters will operate from EADS Casa's plant at Getafe near Madrid and UK aircraft will operate from BAE Systems'

Progressive software updates will increase Eurofighter's capabilities

Warton site in north-west England.

Service entry this year still represents a challenge for the partner companies. Although Eurofighter development aircraft are a familiar sight at air shows, the first production aircraft, IPA2, did not fly from Caselle until 5 April this year, followed three days later by IPA3 from Manching. BAE flew IPA1 on 15 April. These Eurofighters are instrumented, however, and have joined the flight-test programme. The first aircraft to be delivered to the RAF is not due to fly until September.

Delivered

Although the UK Ministry of Defence's best entry-into-service date estimate is the end of this year, Eurofighter schedules indicate that the aircraft will be ready for handover in October. Alenia, EADS Casa and EADS Germany are close behind the UK construction programme.

To support the Eurofighter, the RAF will form an operational evaluation unit (OEU) at BAE Warton. At the same time and in the same place, the first service pilot instructor training (SPIT) will begin.

Ahead of delivery of the aircraft, the air forces have received initial spares packages and technical publications, and the industrial support elements are being put in place, says Massimo Tarantola, Eurofighter support programme director.

Phil Jakes, BAE contractor support services (CSS) manager, says the aim of the CSS programme is to train air and ground crew, and transfer technology and understanding to the RAF as it replaces Panavia Tornados F3 air-defence fighters and Sepcat Jaguar GR3 strike aircraft with Eurofighters.

The Eurofighter production contract is split into three tranches, which in turn are split into blocks. Tranche 1 covers 148 aircraft, including five instrumented produc-

tion aircraft (IPA), as well as 38 Eurofighters to be built in Block 1 and 105 in Block 2. The RAF will receive 13 Block 1 aircraft and 39 from the second block. The three IPAs now flying are two-seaters, as will be the first aircraft delivered to the partner air forces. The EADS Casa-built IPA4 and BAE-assembled IPA5 will be single-seaters that will fly next year. The first operational single-seater, BS001, will go to the RAF late next year, with BS004, the UK's first Block 2 aircraft, to be handed over in early 2004.

As production progresses, aircraft will be delivered with progressively improved capabilities. Block 1 will be equipped with PSP1 software cleared for the training role. The following 70 Eurofighters will have PSP2, allowing air-to-air operations and providing the full MIDS datalink functionality. The last 35 Tranche 1 fighters will be equipped with PSP3 software to the full operational capability standard. This will include some air-to-surface capabilities.

Jakes says BAE has been working closely with the RAF since the "Case White" – or CSS – contract was signed by the UK MoD and BAE in March last year. Case White provides engineering and logistics support for Block 1 Eurofighters, which will fly 1,300h during the contract, he says. SPIT will qualify 16 aircrew to fly the Eurofighter. Six will be OEU pilots, with the rest being the first instructors for 29 Sqn, the Eurofighter operational conversion unit (OCU).

In addition, BAE's CSS contract requires it to return the 13 Block 1 Eurofighters to final assembly for upgrade to Block 2 configuration and the transfer of all government furnished equipment to the RAF on completion of flying. At the end of Case White, the OEU will be transferred to RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire, which will also be home to the OCU. The base is now undergoing refurbishment in readiness for the Eurofighter's arrival late next year.

Jakes says the CSS approach "derisks" service entry, as it allows for operation of the new aircraft from the UK location with the most Eurofighter experience. Warton is home to BAE's Eurofighter development team. Two development aircraft and IPA1 are based at the airfield. BAE personnel who have looked after these three aircraft will be responsible for first and second line maintenance of the RAF's fighters, while also passing on their knowledge to the service personnel.

The SPIT syllabus will consist of two weeks ground school, followed by four weeks flying. Pilots will be converted to type and gain weapon system familiarity, says Jakes. Each pilot will fly 12 sorties and around 15h as well as use BAE simulators. These will be used for RAF pilot training until devices ordered under the Aircrew

