

AIR TRANSPORT

Boeing worried by Thai ETOPS suspension

Thai Airways International has unilaterally suspended 120min extended-range twin-engine operations (ETOPS) flights with its six Rolls-Royce Trent 892-powered Boeing 777-300s after the fleet's in-flight shutdown rate rose close to the limit permitted by ETOPS rules.

Boeing is concerned Thai's move could damage its 777 marketing efforts as Airbus steps up its A340 quad-jet sales campaign.

R-R and Boeing are perplexed by the airline's move, which they believe is unnecessary because the shutdown rate, at 0.046/1,000h, remains within the 0.05/1,000h ETOPS limit. In addition, Thai is not operating its 777-300s on routes which require 120min ETOPS.

Thai engineering sources say the airline will only restart 777-300 ETOPS flights after R-R releases a service bulletin to solve a problem discovered with the Trent 892's intermediate pressure compressor (IPC). The manufacturer has asked all operators to inspect, every 250h, first-stage, high-pressure compressor blades for possible damage caused by material leaving the IPC.

On 18 May a Thai 777-300 was forced to divert into Ubon Ratchathani Airport in north-eastern Thailand after suffering a compressor stall in its left-hand engine.

The incident was caused by the failure of an HPC blade. Subsequent boroscope inspections revealed a damaged blade in another Thai Trent 892 that had accumulated only 97 cycles, say the sources.

Thai's fleet of 777-200s, also powered by versions of the Trent 800, remain cleared to operate 120min ETOPS flights because they are treated as a separate fleet and are well within the shutdown limit, say the sources.

DEFENCE GUY NORRIS / LOS ANGELES

GE/R-R plot JSF venture

Engine collaboration will form long-term support infrastructure for F136 family

General Electric and Rolls-Royce have sought US and UK government approval to establish an international joint fighter engine company for the F136 turbofan in development for the Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

The move could be announced as early as this week's Farnborough air show, say US government sources. The company is expected to be modelled on the GE/Snecma CFM International venture and will be structured to give GE a 60% share and Rolls-Royce 40%.

JSF programme sources say the joint company is not intended to work on projects other than the F136 and is being established to form a long-term support infrastructure for F136-powered members of the JSF family, which

is likely to include at least three sub-variants for the different F-35 versions.

Although GE declines to comment, the two companies are thought to have decided on a joint structure as soon as the F136 was funded as a JSF engine. GE is only prepared to say that "the two companies have been talking about supportability issues".

The roots of the joint company can be traced back to 1994 when Allison and GE agreed to collaborate on research and development work as part of the US government's Integrated High Performance Turbine Engine Technology programme.

This relationship was expanded in 1997 with the start of what became the JSF programme and

continued to grow after Rolls-Royce's acquisition of the Indianapolis-based company. Although most US government-related JSF contacts are conducted through the Allison Advanced Development Company (AADC), the formal presence of Rolls-Royce has grown since the JSF programme office engine inter-changeability agreement was signed in June 2001.

Testing of the first F136 is scheduled to begin in 2007, with the first flight on a conventional take-off and landing F136-powered F-35 set for mid-2008.

Both Pratt & Whitney F135 engines and GE-Rolls-Royce F136 engines will be ordered for production Lots 4 and 5, but the two teams will compete head on in Lot 6 in around 2011.



All Nippon Airways' order for nine Boeing 767s is in addition to 42 -300/300ERs previously ordered

AIR TRANSPORT PAUL LEWIS / WASHINGTON DC & ANDREW DOYLE / SINGAPORE

ANA set to announce Boeing order

All Nippon Airways (ANA) is to announce orders for nine additional Boeing 767-300ERs and five more 777-300s at the Farnborough air show on 23 July. The US manufacturer appears keen to play down the deal, however, having previously incorporated all 14 widebodies into its order backlog, and wants to avoid any accusation from rival Airbus of regurgitating past orders.

The Japanese carrier is understood to have insisted on the order being formally announced at the show. Boeing added the nine additional 767-300ERs to its orderbook in March last year before the deal was given airline board approval,

says a source. The General Electric CF6-80C2B6F-powered twinjets replace the airline's remaining older 767-200s and are in addition to 42 -300/300ERs previously ordered.

ANA's five additional 777-300s are believed to be part of an earlier deal and the carrier's total orderbook for the type remains unchanged at 35 aircraft, of which 21 have been delivered. The five Pratt & Whitney PW4090-powered aircraft are scheduled for delivery in 2004 and 2006 and will supplement five -300s it already operates. ANA in addition operates 12 777-200s and four -200ERs. Six GE90-powered 777-300ERs are on order.

There have been discussions about converting ANA's 777-300 to a single class, seating over 500 passengers on Japan's busy routes between Tokyo, Sapporo and Osaka. The move appears to be designed to forestall an order from a Japanese carrier for the Airbus A380. Both ANA and Japan Airlines are looking at the 550-seater, but sources say they are more interested in a domestic version as they are concerned they might not be able to fill international routes.

■ Airbus and Boeing are hoping to announce this week an order from UK low-cost carrier EasyJet for up to 120 narrowbody aircraft - either A319/A320s or 737-700s.