

## DELIVERIES

## Newcomer gears up

Start-up charter carrier Morocco Airways took delivery of two Airbus A320-200s last week ahead of the airline's launch on 27 October. The carrier plans to use the ex-Ansett Australia aircraft on behalf of an unnamed French tour operator for flights to Belgium, France and the Netherlands from Marrakesh.

The aircraft were delivered from Gulf Aircraft Maintenance in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, where they were reconfigured from Ansett's two-class seating to a 174-seat charter interior. The aircraft are leased from Singapore Aircraft Leasing Enterprise.

Said Mouhid, Morocco Airways general manager, says the company is talking to independent tour operators in Scandinavia and the UK for services to start next March. He expects interest in routes from Spain – which are unpopular due to political tension between the countries – to pick up next year.

New contracts could enable the carrier to acquire more aircraft and add destinations in northern Morocco, he says.

## FLEET DEVELOPMENT

## Sibir goes to Armenia to escape Russian taxman

Airline will try out Airbus A320s through Armavia subsidiary, so avoiding penalties

Armenian regional airline Armavia has taken delivery of the first of two Airbus A320s as part of a plan by its part owner Sibir Airlines to avoid Russian taxes on foreign aircraft and test the type for possible integration with its own fleet of Russian-built aircraft.

Novosibirsk-based Sibir, which recently acquired a majority share in the carrier, has leased the two aircraft from International Lease Finance, but cannot operate them in Russia due to a 20% import tax and 20% value added tax if they are registered in the country.

Sibir has been trying to acquire A320-family aircraft for almost a year. It will use the Armavia operation to test the A320s in the hope that the operation will persuade Russian authorities to remove or ease tax levels. If it is successful, the airline will integrate the type into its fleet based in Novosibirsk and Moscow Domodedovo.

The A320s will be crewed by



Armavia receives first A320 on behalf of parent airline Sibir

Sibir to operate scheduled services from Armavia's base in the Armenian capital Yerevan to Moscow and Paris. The Armenian carrier operates one Tupolev Tu-134 and one Tu-154.

After absorbing the route network from the bankrupt Vnukovo Airlines, Sibir has opened 12 new

domestic routes and three to Germany. The airline is pursuing its aggressive expansion despite financial losses caused by the take-over.

■ Privately owned Armenian International Airlines intends to lease three Airbus aircraft by next year for flights to Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris, local press reports say.

## MARKETPLACE

■ **Bangkok Airways** will receive its third and fourth Boeing 717s this month. The 717-200s, leased from Boeing, will operate from Bangkok to points in Cambodia, China and Thailand.

■ **Malaysia Airlines** is wet-leasing three Boeing 747-200 Freighters from **Air Atlanta Icelandic**. The first aircraft, based in Kuala Lumpur, has already started operations, the second will follow next month and the third will enter service next March to Australia, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands and Taiwan.

■ **Deutsche BA** has leased two Boeing 737-300s from **CIT Aerospace**, joining 16 737s.

■ **Russia's Kras Air-Krasnoyarsk Airlines** is leasing two Boeing 767-200s from **GATX**.

## AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL DAVID LEARMOUNT / LONDON

## UK pays price for NATS shake-up

Fearing another drop in traffic from future wars or terrorist attacks, the UK Civil Aviation Authority has raised the price cap on UK air traffic control fees. The pressure, however, to reduce the fees charged by the part-privatised National Air Traffic Services (NATS) remains. In exchange for allowing the less-stringent price capping, the CAA has ordered a radical restructuring of NATS.

If the CAA's recommendation is accepted after a final 28-day consultation period, user charges will rise by two percentage points lower than inflation in 2003-05: the CAA had proposed five percentage points lower than inflation. By 2005, airlines face projected prices 8% higher than present. The CAA points out that under NATS' original

proposals charges would have increased 24% in the same period. The CAA adds that the reductions already implemented mean that NATS is no longer Europe's most expensive air traffic services provider and is now behind Switzerland and Belgium.

A key change facing NATS is to shift its organisation from a project finance model to a regulated operating company. CAA chairman Sir Roy McNulty – formerly head of NATS – says the government made a mistake setting up the new company on the project finance model, and notes that the National Audit Office has come to the same conclusion. Other reorganisation measures include:

■ A £130 million (\$203 million) investment from the UK govern-

ment and airport operating company BAA, split 50/50, which will reduce senior debt to £600 million;

■ commitment to achieving more reductions in the ratio of senior debt to regulatory asset base (RAB);

■ restructuring or refinancing the senior debt to allow a repayment rate closer to the RAB rate of depreciation;

■ revision of the terms of existing debt to allow NATS to access to alternative financing.

McNulty denies that the system's complexity is an indictment of the public-private partnership used to part-privatise NATS. He says: "Under the older, simpler system, the reaction [to the post-11 September income fall] would have been to hike the prices for the users."