

POLICY KATE SANSFIELD / TARBES, FRANCE

Politicians urged to back Europe's general aviation

Socata warns of manufacturing industry "extinction" unless EC develops clear policy

EADS Socata is calling on the European Commission to develop a clear policy for light general aviation, warning that Europe's manufacturing industry risks becoming extinct within the next 15 years.

"The political will to develop and promote this important sector of aviation simply isn't there," says EADS Socata senior executive vice-president Jean-Francois Trassard. Citing the financial difficulties of fellow French general aviation aircraft manufacturers Apex Aviation and Reims Aviation, Trassard says: "The lack of intervention [by the EC] is disabling general aviation manufacturing and operations in Europe. We are all fighting for sur-

vival in a hostile environment."

Tarbes-based Socata, Europe's largest builder of piston- and turboprop-powered aircraft, urges Europe to mirror the efforts of the US government, which it says, through its funding and promotion of programmes such as NASA's Small Aircraft Transportation System programme, "values the role its industry has to play". Trassard says: "General aviation offers many benefits to Europe's economies in terms of employment, but also to its transportation infrastructure and flight training industry. Eventually the only choice of aircraft [for the consumer] will be a Cessna or a Piper."

One of the principal obstacles fac-

ing general aviation in the region, Trassard notes, is its lack of wide public appeal. "It is regarded as elitist, only benefiting a small sector of the community and it is therefore not in politicians' interests to develop and promote its uses," he adds.

The protracted debate in Europe over relaxing single-engine instrument flight rules (SEIFR) for commercial operations serves as an example, Trassard says. "Our industry has been pushing for a change in the rules since 1993 and we are still waiting. In the meantime civil aviation authorities in the USA, Canada, South Africa and Australia have relaxed their SEIFR rules. The European process is too bureaucratic."

Socata is urging changes. Firstly: increased harmonisation between Joint Aviation Authorities member states, where anomalies still exist. "Parts, such as an emergency locator transmitter, still require a different specification, depending on the country of registration," Socata says. It also wants closer harmonisation between the the JAA and US Federal Aviation Administration to ease the certification effort. Thirdly, Socata is calling for unified European airspace below 29,000ft (8,845m), which, it says, would ease the flow of operations between member countries.

Finally, Socata wants investment in the development of new general aviation products, to drive technological advances in Europe in avionics, airframe and engine design.

Graham Forbes, chief executive of the UK General Aviation Manufacturers and Traders Association and co-ordinator of the European Council for General Aviation Support, backs Socata's calls.

He says: "Europe needs its own light aircraft industry or we will lose the expertise we have built up over the years. Manufacturers will need financial help to develop new models and breathe new life into existing aircraft. We need to recognise new European diesel powerplant manufacturers."

DESIGN

Socata weighs product options



Socata's six-aircraft line-up starts with the TB9 GT Tampico

EADS Socata is planning to launch a new aircraft type within the next 18 months and says it is evaluating a number of models to fill a niche in its line-up.

"We don't want to compete with new or existing models," says Socata. "We have three options: a piston aircraft to fit at the bottom of our TB GT range; a piston or turboprop type to fit between the high-end piston [the TB21 GT Trinidad] and our TBM700 single-engined turboprop; or a new type at the top end of our line," it says. Socata's six-aircraft line-up starts at the \$169,000 TB9 GT Tampico and ends with the \$2.6 million TBM700C2. "We have made changes to our product line. The latest was to introduce the increased performance C2 – but we feel the time is right to launch an all-new design," it adds.

Socata is considering a jet-powered model, "although a single-engined jet is not a favoured option. This is a tough market to enter without a proven powerplant," it says. The manufacturer hopes to develop a new product with another aircraft manufacturer or one of its aerostructures partners. One possibility is a partnership between Socata and Dassault, for which Socata builds parts for the Falcon 50 and 900 ranges. Socata also has a contract with Dassault to build the upper fuselage and wing fairing for the Falcon 7X.

ELECTRIC SR20

Cirrus Design has delivered the first electric SR20 Version 2.0 to the 907th Flight Squadron Aero Club in Jamison, Pennsylvania. The aircraft, which is available in three configuration packages, replaces the traditional analogue-instrumented SR20. The aircraft features Avidyne FlightMax multifunction displays, Garmin International GNS 430 global positioning system navigation and communication hardware, and the S-Tec System 20 autopilot. It also offers a standard electrically powered directional gyro for heading information. The electrical system is a single-alternator, dual-battery, dual-bus fault-tolerant design, similar to the design on the higher-specification electric SR22, which has been in service for nearly two years.

NAVAJO REPLACES

The Western Australian Police have taken delivery of a Piper Navajo to replace a Cessna 406 lost in a fatal accident last year. The piston twin will join a Cessna 182, Eurocopter/Kawasaki BK117 and a second Navajo at the force's Jandakot base.

WHEEL CLAMPING

The Israeli government has begun enforcing a regulation requiring operators to clamp general aviation aircraft while they are parked in airports and airfields around the country. The move has been made in response to the 11 September US terrorist attacks. Seven operators were summoned to the Israeli civil aviation authority on 26 January and warned that repeated violations will result in the suspension of their licences. Aircraft owners are required to clamp one of the aircraft's wheels with a government-authorized locking device.

STRONGER LION

France's Issoire Aviation has developed a more-powerful, four-seat version of the APM 20 Lionceu two-seat light piston trainer. The APM 21 Lion is designed for aerial work such as towing and equipped with a 75kW engine and variable-pitch propeller.