

PERFORMANCE MICHAEL PHELAN / LONDON

Airbus adapts A320 for Florence

Manufacturer identifies technical solutions to allow aircraft family shorter landing distances at Italian airport

Airbus is studying technical changes to improve the A320 family's short-field landing performance as it jostles with Boeing for a forthcoming Meridiana fleet-renewal order.

The Italian carrier is considering A319/A320s or Boeing 737-700/800s to replace its four BAe 146-200s and 17 Boeing MD-82/83s, and says any order is likely to be "four or five smaller A319/737-700s with the rest

A320/737-800s". A key criterion will be the smaller type's landing performance in the wet at Florence airport, where the short runway limits Meridiana to operating 146s.

Airbus and Boeing say they can provide a full payload capability into Florence's short 1,455m (4,770ft) Runway 05 for Meridiana, with both manufacturers conducting flight demonstrations for the airline.

Airbus tested an A320 in wet con-

ditions in April, while Boeing demonstrated a 737-based Boeing Business Jet in May. Boeing says only paperwork is needed for the European Joint Aviation Authorities to approve 737-700 wet operations with 133 passengers, Meridiana's requirement. Airbus is understood to be proposing changes to its A319 to allow shorter landing distances.

Airbus confirms that it has "identified some technical solutions which will be retrofittable", thought to include further aft centre of gravity limits to reduce approach speed and "anti-droop" aileron positions to improve braking performance. Airbus is also analysing its flight-test data to determine exact wet runway grip properties, which may allow it to reduce required margins.

Sergio Rosa, Meridiana senior vice-president technical operations, says diversions will always be unavoidable at Florence in adverse weather conditions whatever the aircraft's capabilities. "They [A319 or 737] will not be able to land on

Runway 23 anyway, so we'll have to accept some diversions, but we'll eliminate the take-off power problems we have today with the 146s," he says.

Alitalia has also moved to larger aircraft at Florence, operating A319s from May. Initially restricted to 100 passengers, Alitalia is now cleared to carry 124.

■ Saab is proposing a revised flight profile for Saab 2000 steep approaches into Lugano airport for Swiss International Air Lines. The Swiss Federal Office of Civil Aviation wants to limit Lugano access to aircraft approved for 6° approaches. The 2000 is certificated for 5.5° approaches and Saab is hoping to avoid supplementary certification for steeper approaches. Swiss had intended replacing the 2000s it operates to Geneva and Zurich with BAE Systems Avro RJs, but start-up carriers, including Darwin Airlines, plan to operate 2000s from Lugano from next month. A final decision is expected by mid-September.



Airbus demonstrated an A320 in wet conditions at Florence in April

DISPUTE EMMA KELLY / PERTH

Data distributors resist licence move by Airservices Australia

Airservices Australia is warning the three major aeronautical data redistributors that it will take legal action against them unless they comply with the service provider's new licensing arrangements.

On 1 September, Airservices introduced a process requiring commercial redistributors of its aeronautical data to be licensed. During a six-month consultation period there will be no charge for the licence. While seven small Australian companies have already signed up, Airservices says the three major data providers in the business – believed to be European Aeronautical Group (EAG), Jeppesen and Lido – have criticised the service provider's new policy and not complied with the process.

Airservices is the first service provider to introduce a licensing arrangement for aeronautical data. Eurocontrol plans to follow suit and others are expected to follow. Airservices says the major three data companies have accused it of breaching International Civil Aviation Organisation policy and have called for a global meeting to discuss it. Airservices argues that service providers in ICAO states have the right to protect intellectual property.

Airservices says it would prefer to resolve the issue without going to court. A series of teleconferences with those companies that have yet to sign are planned in coming weeks.

Licensing is being introduced to address safety concerns, says Airservices, because "on a number of occasions errors in the way base aeronautical data was repackaged by commercial redistributors has resulted in incorrect data being supplied downstream".

ORDER MICHAEL PHELAN / LONDON

Astraeus adds aircraft

UK charter carrier Astraeus is gearing up for a fleet-renewal order, as the 18-month-old airline looks to provide capacity for future growth. The airline wants to acquire up to 10 Airbus A319s or Boeing 737-700s, and expects to finalise a deal by the end of this year.

The Gatwick, UK-based carrier has a fleet of four leased 737-300s, including one in service with Iceland Express, and two leased -700s, but says having four different lessors causes commonality issues.

"Our core leases expire in early 2005," says Jonathan Hinkles, Astraeus commercial director, "and we're considering a combination of purchasing and leasing to replace them. We're looking at six to 10 aircraft."

One advantage of the A319s is that they could be configured with 152 seats for Astraeus, against 148

on the 737s, says Hinkles, although Astraeus' wide-ranging operations would pose challenges for any single fleet. "As well as short-haul flights for tour operators we fly the -700s on 7h sectors for private customers. We already know that the -700 can do these different missions, but we need to investigate the A319," he adds.

■ Iceland Express says that in its first five months of operations it has captured 75% of the increase in total traffic to Copenhagen and London from Reykjavik compared with last year, but adds that it is bracing for a difficult winter as it awaits an Icelandic court ruling on competition complaints lodged against Icelandair. The airline accuses Icelandair of cross-subsidising its London and Copenhagen routes to undercut Iceland Express.