KLM to convert 747s

AMSTERDAM

KLM has given Boeing a $200 million contract for a new 747-300 and the conversion of ten of its 747-200Bs to stretched-upper deck -300 standard.

The order has prompted Boeing to give a definite go-ahead for the 747 conversion programme. The manufacturer tells Flight that several other airlines are “more than interested”. Among these airlines is Alia, which wants three converted and whose aircraft are likely to be the first to undergo modification. Boeing also reveals that British Airways is interested in converting some of its 747s—probably its 747-200Bs—powered by RB.211-524D4.

The order for the new 747-300 is KLM’s second for the variant: its first 747-300 was delivered at the beginning of this month.

The 747-200Bs to be converted are the ten most modern -200Bs in the Dutch flag carrier’s fleet. All ten are powered by General Electric CF6-50C engines, which will be uprated to give higher thrust. According to KLM, the six older aircraft it has are not being converted because they have Pratt & Whitney JT9D-7W powerplants, which cannot be uprated so easily to give higher maximum take-off thrust. These aircraft—all delivered in 1970 and 71—also have lower maximum take-off weights, so are not as suitable for -300 conversion.

The conversions will give each aircraft 45 extra seats. KLM says that it will use them mainly on its North Atlantic and Far East routes, where it could do with extra seat capacity. The first will go to Boeing for conversion in November next year.

Each conversion will take about 2-2½ months; KLM will only have one 747 at a time out of service for conversion, so the programme will not be completed until mid-1986. The just-ordered new 747-300 will be delivered in September 1984 to keep capacity up to strength. It was originally on option for 1986 delivery.

The total cost of the conversion deal will be more than $100 million. The airline is getting the new 747-300 for a lower price than usual, possibly under $85 million, because it already has engines for the aircraft. Three of the engines are from a DC-10 which suffered damage upon leaving the runway while landing at Panama City. Although this aircraft was repairable, KLM’s costing showed that it was more economical to remove the engines, strip the hull fittings, take some insurance settlement, and sell the bare hull for spares than it was to repair it and buy engines for the new -300.

In our September 17 issue we said that the 747-300 is more aerodynamically efficient than the -200B. The greater distance between the leading edge of the wing and the end of the upper deck bulge on the -300 (and the 747SP), compared with the -200B, improves the aircraft’s profile drag characteristics so that long-range cruise speed is improved by Mach 0-01-0-02 in the 747-300, and by Mach 0-01 in the SP.

But a standard high-gross weight 747-200B (certificated at 833,000 lb mtow) fitted with the latest Pratt & Whitney JT9D-7R4G2 or General Electric CF6-80A engines would almost certainly have a longer range than the 833,000 lb 747-300. Boeing flight-test data has shown that the range of a JT9D-7R4-powered 747-300 at 833,000 lb is the same as that of a JT9D-7Q-powered 747-200B at 820,000 lb.

This anonymous 737 landing at Las Vegas is one of five operated by EG & G, which provides a shuttle service between Las Vegas and the nuclear testing ranges in Nevada.

767 engine stall—no answer yet

CHICAGO

United Airlines says that it is still not clear why both engines stalled in its Boeing 767 on August 19 (Flight, September 3, page 606). The aircrew had to shut the engines down and restart them during the descent.

The engines were set to a specific r.p.m. for normal descent, but now United has adjusted the idle designation up to N, 56 per cent and N, 40 per cent, and fuel controls to approach settings during early descent.

Pratt & Whitney is researching the matter, and is attempting to test the engines under identical conditions to those when the stall occurred. P&W expects to have an accurate assessment of the problem by the end of next month.

United accepts that fuel control units are being closely investigated.

SAFETY UPDATE

Explanations for the ice-from-the-sky incidents which occurred during August in the southern UK should soon be available.

Large chunks of ice fell from blue skies over Bedfordshire, causing some damage and considerable fright, though hurting no-one. The incidents being investigated by the UK Civil Aviation Authority are one at Hitchin on August 23, and one at Ampthill and another at Bushey on August 27. These towns are close to each other and located under skies busy with international and domestic air traffic.

Meteorologists say that weather-induced airframe or engine icing is most unlikely to have caused these incidents, since the nearest potential icing conditions were over a Europe bathed at the time, in summer sun, were over the Dordogne in southern France.

The possible explanations which remain are the formation of ice on the belly of an aircraft whose galley waste-pipe heater was not operating, or whose lavatory cleaning trap (for use only by servicing personnel emptying the lavatory tanks during turn-around) was faulty. The latter looks unlikely at present because the ice which was recovered, still under analysis, is reported to be clean. That some form of unusual weather caused airframe icing cannot yet be ruled out.

The CAA has examined radar records for the area at that time, and has written to “three foreign carriers” asking them to help in the investigation.

NEWS SCAN

Alitalia has seen a small drop in traffic carried and capacity offered during 1983’s first half year compared with the same period last year, but has seen a 14-5 per cent increase in turnover. Tonne/km carried dropped 3-2 per cent, tonne/km offered by 1-7 per cent.

British Aerospace’s Jetstream 31 has successfully completed four weeks of trials of a water methanol injection system for its Garrett TPE-331 engines. The system will improve the aircraft’s hottest and-high take-off performance, making it more easily marketable in countries where such conditions exist.

On October 4 more champagne than usual flowed on British Airways Concorde flights to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the first trans-atlantic jet services, which had been flown by BOAC Comet 4s.