Beech buys Rutan technology

WICHITA

Scaled Composites, Burt Rutan's specialist composite design and manufacturing company, has been bought by Beech for "an undisclosed cash sum" according to Glenn Ehling, executive vice-president of Beech Aircraft Corporation. Rutan will remain as president of the company.

In 1982 Beech, a Raytheon subsidiary, contracted Scaled Composites to design, build, and test the 85 per cent scale "proof of concept" (POC) Starship. It was completed in less than nine months at Mojave, California.

The acquisition of Rutan's operation gives Beech a unique capability to apply composite material technology to meet the current and future needs of the aircraft market," says the company.

Scaled Composites was founded by Rutan in 1982, since when it has successfully designed and built several all-composite POC aircraft for commercial customers. Beech will now control this expertise in a competitive market.

Rutan is well known for his range of canard light aircraft such as the VariEze and LongEz, and SCI has carried out detailed design work for NASA's AD-1 oblique-wing research aircraft and the Fairchild/Ames 62 per cent scale New Generation Trainer.

SCI is based next door to the Rutan Aircraft Factory at Mojave Airport. Facilities include a large hangar, instrumentation and flight test departments, and a machine shop.

More business for Airship Industries

LONDON

Airship Industries has signed a £3.5 million deal with leisure company Resorts International for use of a Skyship 600 for promotional and advertising work. The announcement follows the recent £4 million contract with Canadian Engineering Surveys.

Resorts International has said that it would be interested in contributing to development costs of a 200-seat civil version of Skyship 7000, a much bigger craft being studied by the US Navy and various government agencies for command and surveillance duties. A military contract would be necessary before the civil version was funded, however.

An announcement is imminent on whether the US Coastguard has decided to undertake a full-scale operational evaluation of a Skyship 600 for use as a surveillance and interception craft. The contract, worth around £3 million, would be seen as a strong indication that the coastguard intended to purchase a number of Skyships.

A two-week lease with Pan Am begins this week, for use of a Skyship 600 in airline colours for advertising over the City of London.

New Zealand tests Methanol

HAMILTON

Methanol is being tested as a replacement fuel for avgas in New Zealand. A Fletcher Fu-24-954 agricultural aircraft, powered by a Lycoming IO-720-A1 engine, has been modified to run on methanol by Pacific Aerospace Corporation of Hamilton, North Island.

Company interest in the conversion was encouraged by the high cost of avgas in New Zealand, which presently sells for around $NZ 1.10 per litre. Methanol costs only 26 cents per litre. By adding one per cent of water to the fuel, the corrosive effects of methanol on magnesium alloys can be prevented. Studies by the New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research indicated that the protective coating over the metal surface which is resistant to attack.

The methanol-burning engine runs slightly cooler than the avgas-powered version, producing 480h.p. compared with 490h.p. from the standard unit.

The Fu-24 is the mainstay of the New Zealand crop spraying industry, and the company is directing its efforts at the domestic market at this stage.

New Zealand is plagued by an absence of available petroleum fuels. Recent exploration has discovered oil fields capable of producing up to only five per cent of domestic requirements. An abundance of natural gas and condensate, and extremely light distillate, has resulted in a major drive to convert the auto industry to alternative fuels.

Gates delivers to China

TUCSON

Gates Learjet Corporation has handed over a new Learjet 35A to the People's Republic of China in ceremonies in Tucson, Arizona. Officials of the Republic were on hand to accept delivery.

The aircraft, the fifth Learjet destined for operations in China, will be used for geological survey, aerial mapping, and executive operations. Two other Learjet 35As were "delivered" to China in June.

All three Learjets were due to fly across the Pacific to Beijing last week. Two long-range Learjet 36s are already operating in China.

Gates Learjet has already trained five pilots and 13 mechanics for China. The company has established an extensive spares and product support programme, with a technical representative based in Beijing. It is also conducting pilot training in China.