ments was the 47% growth in piston-singles from the revised 697 aircraft moved in 1988 to 1,023 last year. This is the highest figure since 1985. There have not been two consecutive years of growth in piston-single deliveries since 1976-8, although it must be pointed out that 1978's 14,398 was the highest ever.

Seven manufacturers vie for a place in this sector. By far and away leader of the pack is Piper. More than a quarter of piston-single shipments are PA-28-161C Cadet two-seat trainers, reflecting an increase in student pilot training, according to GAMA. Another major factor in the sharp increase last year was

"The primary cause of decline is the product-liability crisis"

the ageing of the existing general-aviation fleet.

Piper's other leading models last year were the Malibu cabin-class single, of which 90 were shipped, along with 49 Archers and 48 Cubs, the vintage design finding an immediate market since its re-introduction. Piper shipped 29 Arrows and between ten and 20 examples each of the Warrior, Dakota, Saratoga, Turbo Arrow and Saratoga SF.

Beech holds second place in the singles league with the Bonanza, of which some 178 were delivered last year. Also showing strongly last year was Mooney. The Texas manufacturer shipped 143 aircraft, including 69 examples of the basic 201, 30 with the Lycoming Sabre engine, and 14 powered by Porsche's PFM.3200. Christen Industries shipped 49 Huskies and 26 Pitts. Maule delivered 35 aircraft, Lake 23, and Bellanca seven.

GAMA's Moore looks forward to the award of the US Air Force contract to provide its Tanker/Transport training system, expected in March. "This will be the largest single defence contract awarded to general-aviation manufacturers. The $1.6 billion programme will provide 211 off-the-shelf business jets over a four-to-five-year period."

Employment opportunities in the general-aviation industry in the USA are expected to improve this year, but the workforce is still 50% down on that of ten years ago, according to GAMA. "The industry faces a major impediment to its growth in the continuing product-liability crisis which caused this long-term drop in employment," concludes Moore, "but we are confident our industry can manage to some degree in spite of these difficulties."

Last year Cessna chairman, Russ Meyer pledged that he would restart piston-single production within 24h of product-liability laws being passed. Should such legislation be enacted, the US general-aviation industry has a major opportunity to introduce new designs and attitudes, according to industry newcomers. Euralair's Alexandre Couvelaire, chairman and president of Mooney, says that he found "an unbelievably old-fashioned industry" when he entered general aviation four years ago. "It is the only aviation segment that has failed to keep the pace of technological progress in this century. Essentially, general aviation has not changed since [the Second World War]."