Spares deficit grounds Tu-22s

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IN MOSCOW

The mission-capable rate of Soviet air force Tupolev Tu-22 Backfires is only 30% to 40%, and some aircraft are grounded for up to six months because of a lack of spares, according to a commander of one of the bomber wings.

Speaking in the Soviet media, Col Igor Hvarov said: “Our aircraft are very good, intelligent in design, but we are not able to realise their full potential. The lifetime of aircraft and engines is low, due to poor manufacturing quality. Many pilots in our air regiment have had in-flight engine failures and have had to make single-engine emergency landings. It is impossible to get spares. As soon as the guarantee period ends, delivery of spares ceases. Some aircraft are grounded for half a year.”

Revealing his regiment’s low mission-capable rate, Hvarov adds: “As far as I know, the situation is no better for the Tu-160 Blackjack strategic bombers and in the fighter regiments.” Lt Gen Yriy Simakhin, head of personnel, confirms this, saying that some operational units have a 3:1 pilots to mission-capable aircraft ratio.

Attempting to increase the time between engine overhaul, senior officers have ordered, for the third time, that the engine inlet temperature of the MiG-23ML series’ Tumanski R35-300 engine be decreased. However, the drop in thrust has lowered the aircraft’s ceiling by 6,500ft (2,000m), taken maximum speed below operational requirements and resulted in worse handling qualities.

Col Victor Ostashko, Commander of an Sukhoi Su-27 Flanker regiment based in the Far East, says: “We are suffering because of the conversion of military suppliers to civil products by the Ministry of Aircraft Industry and senior aviation logistics offices.”

Even though Ostashko’s regiment shares its base with an aircraft manufacturing plant, spares requests are routed through bureaucratic Moscow to suppliers all around the USSR.

Col Volokh, deputy logistics commander of a PVO Division (air defence force) says his unit is short of 26 oxygen masks, 54 pilot’s helmets, 24 throat microphones and even boots. Col Volokh says: “Any item of high-altitude furniture is literally beaten out of Moscow. There is nothing to be found in this military district.”

Aérospatiale unveils new FLA design

Aérospatiale has unveiled a four-turbofan design for the European Future Large Aircraft (FLA). A twin-engined FLA is still a possibility, however.

The French company is part of the European Future Large Aircraft Group, which is working to meet the requirement for a C-130 Hercules/C-160 Transall replacement.

The low-floor, high-wing four-engined version is the leading option for the FLA, which would have a two-person cockpit with fly-by-wire or fly-by-light flight controls.

The FLA would be able to carry a 20,000kg payload up to 3,000nm (5,560km). According to Aérospatiale, the FLA could achieve a 38% time saving over a 3,200nm leg, compared with operations by C-130 or C-160 aircraft. The FLA, fully loaded, would be able to take off from a 2,000m (6,100ft) runway with 361t of fuel. There is a European requirement for between 300 and 350 FLAs.

Potential EFS trainers given first screening

The United States Air Force (USAF) has begun the process of reducing the number of potential bidders for its Enhanced Flight Screening (EFS) trainer aircraft to replace its Cessna T-41s.

The USAF’s Air Training Command will buy 125 EFS, 69 to be based at Hondo, Texas, and 56 at the USAF Academy at Colorado Springs, Colorado. The others will be used to screen potential student pilots, who will each receive 21.5h flying to assess their suitability for progression to basic flying training.

The requirement is for a piston engine, tricycle undercarriage, side-by-side two seater. The EFS performance criteria are airspeeds of 150kt required and 180kt desired, a rate of climb of 750ft/min at 9,000ft and the ability to perform aerobatics between 9,000ft and 12,000ft.

Potential bidders have started demonstrating their aircraft at Wright-Patterson AFB and at the Air Force Academy. The evaluation will last until September, when the USAF is expected to issue a proposal request to the shortlisted manufacturers. Bids must be in by early November and the contract will be awarded in February 1992. Initial operating capability is set for December 1992, and deliveries will continue through 1995.

Overseas bidders include: New Zealand’s Pacific Aerospace ( teamed with Lockheed Aircraft Services) offering its Allison 250-B17 turboprop powered CT-4E; the UK’s Slingsby T67M-260 Firefly, which is the new 260 hp version of the aircraft re-engined with the Allison AE10-540-D4A3; Germany’s Grob G.115T; Italy’s Siai-Marchetti SF-260; and Saab ( teamed with the USA’s Schweizer) offering an updated variant of the Safari.

US contenders are the American General Tiger, Daytona D200, LoPreist/Piper Swiftfly, Meyers 145, Mooney 201 and the Stoddard-Hamilton Glasair II-SRG.