



Even to those used to seeing the bulbous Aerospacelines Super Guppy on the runway at Toulouse in France, the new Airbus Industrie A300-600ST Super Transporter will present an extraordinary sight when it is rolled out in mid-June. How, one might ask, can such a machine, with such apparently small wings and engines, take to the air, let alone with a 45t payload aboard?

Nicknamed the Beluga, the Super Transporter will do so with ease, however, and with an efficiency which will reduce by two-thirds the cost of transporting Airbus components around Europe. It will carry twice the payload of the Super Guppy at twice the speed, enabling the consortium to revolutionise at a stroke the complex system needed for bringing its aircraft parts together from around Europe.

By its very nature as a consortium, Airbus has a unique problem in assembling its range of narrow and widebodied aircraft: namely, how to shuttle components produced in the factories of four major partners to two assembly lines (one in Toulouse, the other at Hamburg, Germany) in such a way as to keep production costs to a minimum. Complicating the problem is the fact that the parts themselves are of a unique nature, combining high quality, and hence value, with size, weight and fragility.

Surface transportation is certainly one way to move parts, and it is used today to complement Super Guppy operations. "We've built up a lot of confidence in road transport," says Hugo Drager, president of the Special Aircraft Transport International (SATIC) group charged with producing the Super Transporter, "but it is time consuming, and there is always the worry about reliability."

Nevertheless, road transport was analysed thoroughly by Airbus in looking for the best way to replace its four Super Guppys. "The problem," says Drager, "is that Toulouse is not conveniently located for either road, rail or sea transport. There was no question of moving Airbus' main production centre, so we were left with air as the best way, especially as Toulouse has

# A QUESTION OF SCALE

*aircraft sections to its two production lines. Julian Moxon reports. Cutaway drawing by Dave Hatchard.*

*Airbus' new A300-600ST Super Transporter, the "Beluga", will revolutionise the way in which the consortium brings*