

# Air France and BA aim to please passengers

**T**WO OF EUROPE'S largest airlines have committed huge sums of money to woo the high-yield passengers with new concepts in first-class cabins.

Air France launched its new L'Espace service on long-haul routes to the Americas and Asia on 11 September, while British Airways is expected to reveal its answer on 18 September.

Centre-piece of Air France's L'Espace 180 product is the new Sicma sleeper seat, which can be converted into an almost-2m bed with a total recline of 180°.

While BA is determined to keep details secret, the airline is known to have several innovations planned under its programme, code-named "Slingshot".

Like Air France's, BA's new seat is bigger and fully reclinable. BA could go one better than Air France, if rumours of the imminent introduction of private, wood-panelled, sleeper cabins are realised. Both seats will incorporate fully-interactive inflight-entertainment systems, telephone and facsimile, and individual reading lights on BA aircraft.

Together with new menus, both airlines are focusing on the concept of "eat when you like" and "sleep when you like", which will



*Air France provides blanket cover for first-class-passenger comfort*

allow passengers the freedom to suit their own eating patterns and body clocks.

The "at-home" feeling is enhanced by self-service bars with refrigerators for food and drink. All seats on Air France flights will be non-smoking, but the airline has introduced a smokers' bar, accommodating four to seven people in the L'Espace cabin.

While BA and Air France are gambling all on winning and keeping the customer, the passengers themselves will have the opportunity to gamble away their money on board, at least in the BA cabin.

BA groundcrew, cabin crew and support staff are already undergoing extensive training for "Slingshot", but management has been determined to avoid premature disclosure of its new service.

The investment is staggering. Air France is spending Fr525 million (about \$100 million), which it expects to recover in two years. It will have converted 29 aircraft by January 1996, including five Boeing 767s, seven 747-400s, six 747-400 Combis and 11 Airbus A340s, with another seven — three 747-100s and four 747-200 Combis to follow before then end of 1996. □

## Pilots unhappy with Iberia

**P**ILOTS OF SPANISH flag carrier Iberia are protesting that the restructuring plan agreed with the airline in 1994 is not being carried out, and are refusing to go along with further measures to cut costs.

The pressure comes as the European Commission (EC) is due to decide before the end of September on whether or not it will allow a fresh injection of Government money for the airline, amounting to Ptas130 billion (\$1.04 billion). Iberia has around Ptas200 billion of debt, and interest payments are running at Ptas2 billion a month.

Pilots' union SEPLA says that it may strike if the agreement reached with the management last December is not upheld. It says that the negotiations with Brussels were "...badly handled", resulting in a two-month delay in the EC decision. "This has wiped out the sacrifices we made on our salaries, which was one of the main elements of the plan," it says.

EC approval of the Government money is vital to the restructuring effort, but there have been major objections from other airlines over the previous cash injection, of Ptas120 billion, which came in 1992 with a Spanish Government promise that it would be the last. Sources believe that the EC is preparing to allow only 40% of the amount demanded, and even then only with tough conditions. □

## Greek air-traffic control causes serious pilot-concern

JULIAN MOXON/PARIS

**E**UROPEAN PILOTS' associations have raised major concerns over continuing "very serious" air-traffic-control (ATC) problems in Greece.

The German and Scandinavian Airline Pilots Associations have called the situation "disastrous", citing a survey of pilots which found that they were frequently unable to understand the instructions issued by Greek controllers. Eurocontrol has also expressed

concern over "major difficulties".

Departure delays from Athens Airport at the peak holiday period in July stood at 57min and, even with reduced traffic since then, are still as high as 52min. Non-scheduled and charter operations have been delayed by as much as 3.5h. The lack of modern equipment also means that crews wanting to overfly Greece are subjected to procedural separations, because radar coverage remains virtually non-existent.

The problem centres on the inability of the Greek Government

to settle a long-running salary and conditions dispute with its air-traffic controllers. The controllers want salaries matching those paid in other European countries.

Athens Airport is equipped with a single 30-year old approach radar, a new Thomson-CSF system remaining unused because of a dispute between the manufacturer and the Greek civil-aviation authority. Greece has just one radar for area coverage, but there is no back-up radar, so it is used only for monitoring aircraft. Only

two of the seven ATC initiatives which were supposed to bring Greece up to international standards have been implemented.

The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers is trying to convince Greece that action must be taken. Despite its reply to the pilots' associations that "...everything is perfect", the Government is understood to be negotiating a new accord with the controllers under which they would be employed independently from other state employees. □