

**Combi Saab 2000
nears certification**

SAAB AIRCRAFT is hoping to complete development and certification of a passenger/cargo combi version of its Saab 2000 turboprop by the end of 1996, in an effort to boost flagging sales.

The Swedish manufacturer is proposing two different basic combi configurations. The aircraft can be configured typically for either 39 seats at a 812mm pitch and 16.4m³ (580ft³) of freight, or 16 passengers and a 29.6m³ aft cargo compartment.

Its layout can be changed through the use of a moveable cargo bulkhead. The smaller of the two freight options will be able to accommodate three containers and up to 3,000kg of cargo. With the bulkhead moved forward of the emergency overwing exits, this can be increased to up to seven containers or pallets.

No additional strengthening of the Saab 2000's floor is required, and the combi would use the existing rear fuselage cargo door.

Saab is understood to be targeting Canadian operator Calm Air as a 2000 combi launch customer. The Winnipeg-based regional carrier already holds options on two Saab 2000s, placed with an earlier order for two 340B Plus aircraft.

The company is keen to launch the combi, as part of a wider push to increase its 2000 orderbook. Sales to date total 38 aircraft, including five orders booked in 1995. Some 25 aircraft have been delivered since the first turboprop entered service with Crossair in 1994.

Efforts are being concentrated on converting 25 Saab 2000 options held by American Eagle (AMR Eagle) into a firm order. Saab officials are confident of securing a deal before the AMR Eagle options expire in July.

It is also working to win a follow-on order for another 25 Saab 340B Plus aircraft for AMR Eagle as replacements for leased ATR 42s. They are in addition to 25 ordered in June 1995 to replace a similar number of early-build 340As.

The ex-AMR Eagle aircraft are being offered to Northwest Airlinck operator Mesaba to replace its Fairchild Metros and de Havilland Dash 8s. □

Japan gears up for US

KEVIN O'TOOLE/TOKYO

BATTLE LINES are being drawn up in Japan and the USA as pressure mounts on both sides of the Pacific for a renegotiation of the controversial passenger bilateral between the two countries.

Although talks are now under way over a revised cargo agreement, the US Government has not yet agreed to passenger negotiations, but there is growing confidence among the Japanese aviation community that its own Government will force the issue by cancelling the existing bilateral if delays continue.

The negotiations are shaping up to be a head-on confrontation between US demands for "open skies" and Japanese determination, backed by Japan Airlines (JAL), to use the talks to iron out perceived

inequalities in the 1952 passenger bilateral.

Such conflicts have already surfaced in the cargo talks, which are due to be completed in March, but have so far progressed little further than a debate over the basis for the negotiations.

JAL is determined that a new passenger agreement should give it greater access to US destinations and end what it sees as "gross inequalities" over beyond-rights.

The Japanese flag carrier says that it only has a limited right from the USA to Brazil, and this amounts to fewer than 4,000 passengers a year. In contrast, the two incumbent US carriers Northwest Airlines and United Airlines transport around 1.8 million passengers to destinations beyond Japan. Some of the US flights are almost entirely filled with traffic originating from

Japan, claims JAL.

"Open skies with the USA is simply unacceptable given the gross inequality of the existing treaty. We're in favour of liberalisation, but equal opportunities would have to be put in place first," says Chikara Sugimoto, JAL's assistant vice-president for international affairs.

In the USA, however, the non-incumbent US carriers American, Delta and Continental Airlines, are stepping up calls for greater market access. American has renewed petitions for new services to Osaka and Tokyo and is leading a coalition of airlines, business interests and others under the name "Access US-Japan". The aim of the group is to put pressure on the White House for a liberalised aviation agreement.

The coalition has called for President Clinton to start negotia-



Viscount's last passenger flight

THE UK'S MOST SUCCESSFUL POST-WAR turboprop airliner, the Vickers Viscount, will make its last passenger flight later this year. The three British World Airlines passenger aircraft, which have been carrying Shell Expro oil workers between Aberdeen and Sumburgh for 15 years, will be converted to Freightmasters, following delivery of the first of its new ATR 72-210s on 1 April. The three Viscounts will join five others already in operation for Parcelforce. British World intends to take the 76-seat Viscount on a tour of UK airports, where it will be offering pleasure flights.

**PS-90A certificated
— and criticised**

SERIES PRODUCTION of the Aviadvigatel PS-90A turbofan at Perm Motors has been approved by the CIS Aviation Register. The certificate has only been issued for two years, during which time engine-reliability problems will have to be ironed out, says the aviation authority.

The engine has come in for severe criticism recently from Aeroflot general manager Yevgeniy Shaposhnikov, who says that in 1995 Aeroflot technicians replaced 31 faulty PS-90A engines on five Ilyushin Il-96-300 airliners.

Shaposhnikov says: "It is more profitable to give up altogether operating Russian-built aircraft, the Il-96-300 in particular, because all our profit is being spent not on renewing the fleet, not for raising efficiency of services, but for repairing engines."

Vladimir Kinderknecht, Perm Motors general director, says that the certificate is an "appreciation of our abilities to survive". He adds: "We have been given a chance which we must use without sparing any effort." □