Rohr relaunches Valsan 727 re-engineing programme

GUY NORRIS/**LOS ANGELES**

ROHR, THE CALIFORNIA-based nacelle manufacturer, has launched the "Super 27" Boeing 727 re-engineing programme which lapsed with the failure of the Valsan 727RE "Quiet 727" effort.

The company, supported by Pratt & Whitney, will offer to re-engine predominantly late-production 727-200 Advanced models with JT8D-217C/219 powerplants, although "...low-time -100s or -200s will be suitable", says business-development manager Robert Korn. Rohr has acquired the rights to Valsan's supplemental type certificate and says that work will begin immediately, with the first delivery due in early 1997.

The modification removes the existing JT8D-9/15 or -17R engines from number one and three (outboard) positions and replaces them with -217Cs or -219s. The original, tail-mounted, number two engine is retained, equipped with a new acoustic exhaust mixer, and used at low power setting for take-off and landing. "In total, you get around 249kN [56,000lb] of take-off power, which gives you a thrust-to-weight ratio of 3.2:1, or nearly that of a 757," says Korn.

As well as reducing the 727's noise levels to comply with Stage 3, the re-engineing also provides a 6-7% reduction in fuel consumption (for the -200), providing at least a 560km (300nm) increase in range

Rohr says that final negotiations are under way with unnamed customers for the first batch of aircraft, which it says,"...is under ten". It sees a potential market for between 50 and 100 out of the 1,370 units estimated still to be in service. Mostly likely customers include express-parcels, small-airline, charter and executive users. The cost of the modification is "...between $12 million and $15 million", compared to current 727 hushkits, which range from $1.9 million to $2.5 million. "Customers, however, will be able to offset the cost by generating up to $2.7 million from the sale of their old engines," says Korn.

Each kit will consist of new nacelles, struts, engine mounts and thrust reversers, plus engines. Around 80% of the components will be made by Rohr at its sites in Arkansas, California, Maryland and Texas. Rohr supplied nacelle kits to Valsan for the 727RE programme.

"We did an autopsy into why Valsan failed and basically we came up with 'terrible timing'," says Korn. At the height of its programme, Valsan had orders and options for more than 200 aircraft, but finished with just 23 conversions. ❑

Mark Wagner

Vnukovo's Tu-154M fleet totals more than 30 aircraft

Vnukovo Tu-154 hits mountain in cloud

A VNUKOVO AIRLINES Tupolev Tu-154M has crashed about 10km (5.5nm) from Longyearbyen Airport on the northern Norwegian island of Svalbard (Spitzbergen), while approaching the airport's runway 28. The accident to the Moscow-based airliner happened at midday local time on 29 August.

Early reports said that all 129 passengers and 14 crew were thought to have been killed in the crash. The Tu-154's crew was in contact with Longyearbyen air-traffic control, but gave no emergency call.

Mountainous terrain in the area averages more than 1,000m (3,300) high, with the instrument-landing-system (ILS) approach to runway 28 following the Adventdalen glacial valley.

Weather reports which were issued by the rescue services said that cloudbase was below the peaks. The airfield is close to the coast and has a distance-measuring-equipment beacon, ILS for both runways and an off-airfield non-directional beacon.

Vnukovo was the first of the Aeroflot divisions to be privatised and the carrier had not experienced a fatal accident before.

Flight VKO2801 was believed to be carrying passengers from Moscow to the Russian mining community on Svalbard. ❑

Saeaga plans for major expansion

THE MALAYSIAN OWNER of Saeaga Airlines has unveiled plans to acquire larger jet-powered aircraft and expand the ten-month-old domestic carrier internationally.

According to Malaysian tycoon and Saeaga chairman Ting Pek Khiing, the airline plans to order ten Boeing 737-700s. "We will be signing a deal with Boeing next month," he claims.

The airline had earlier looked at the Airbus A320 and McDonnell Douglas MD-90, and recently made a presentation of its plans to Malaysia's civil-aviation authority, based on using the A320.

Ting says that he wants to use the new aircraft to open up routes to Australia and Taiwan. Saeaga was established to serve the regional triangle bordering Brunei, the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, Indonesia's Kalimantan province and the southern Philippines.

The airline has struggled to attract new investors and is only now operating *ad hoc* charter services with two Bombardier de Havilland Dash 8s and a Canadair Regional Jet (*Flight International*, 17-23 July). ❑

ValuJet take-off

THE US FEDERAL Aviation Administration reinstated ValuJet's air-carrier operating privileges on 29 August, allowing the grounded US low-cost carrier to resume flight operations as early as 4 September.

ValuJet successfully completed a series of "proving runs" for FAA inspectors in late August, and the US Department of Transportation (DoT) issued a "show-cause" order ,tentatively finding ValuJet fit to resume its certificated domestic scheduled air service.

Interested parties have been given seven days to contest the DoT order. The department has found that ValuJet's management team is qualified to run the airline and that the low-cost carrier has corrected the safety concerns which caused it to be grounded on 17 June ❑