

## Resignation hits Air France Europe

JULIAN MOXON/PARIS

**T**HE DIRECTOR-general of Air France domestic carrier Air France Europe (formerly Air Inter), Jean-Pierre Courcol, has resigned after a year in the job. He becomes the fourth president to leave the post in five years.

Courcol was appointed by Air France president Christian Blanc in July 1995 to manage the fusion of the two airlines, but became increasingly embroiled in battles with Air France Europe's unions over his restructuring plan.

Although he gives no specific reason for the move, Courcol appears to have wanted to press home the point that the airline had no choice but to cut jobs and merge with Air France if it was to survive.

In his resignation letter, Courcol says that "...the formidable economic war that the major airlines are facing, and the situation Air France Europe is in...has convinced me that fusion [with Air France] has become the only way to maintain employment and to achieve the two-year recovery plan that I have put in place".

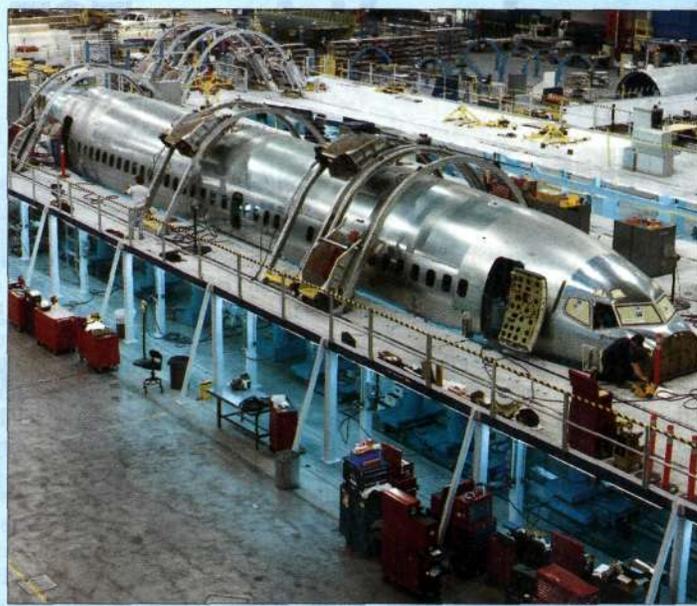
The plan hit trouble at the beginning of July, when pilots refused to agree to the same working conditions as those of Air France, whose pilots earn an average of 15% less. Courcol also wanted to cut 950 jobs (from the 11,000 total) over the two-year period. On 26 August, the unions rejected the plan, saying that there was "no economic justification" for the cuts.

Courcol will not be replaced directly. Marc Véron, current director-general of Air France, will become responsible for the fusion of the two airlines. □

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### TRANSCRIBE ACCIDENT

The de Havilland Canada Twin Otter which crashed at Playa del Carmen, Yucatan, Mexico (*Flight International*, 14-20 August, P14), was owned by TransCaribe Airlines, not by AeroCaribe as reported.



## First Boeing 737-700 fuselage approaches completion

**T**HE FIRST fuselage for Boeing's New Generation 737 family is nearing completion at the company's Wichita factory. The 737-700 fuselage, pictured above in an integration tool, will be shipped by train to the final assembly line at Renton, Washington, in one piece. The first flight of the new 737 has been scheduled to take place in February 1997.

# Airbus is poised to join AE-100 programme

PAUL LEWIS/SINGAPORE

**C**HINESE AND European aerospace-industry negotiators are expected to reach an agreement by the end of the month for Airbus Industrie to join the proposed Chinese AE-100 regional jet programme.

Under a plan which is now in the process of being finalised, Airbus will assume a leading role in Aero International (Regional) (AI(R)) subsidiary, Aero International Asia (AIA). Aviation Industries of China (AVIC) has already selected AIA as its major partner in the development of the AE-100.

AVIC and its junior partner, Singapore Technologies (ST), have been pressing AI(R) to widen European participation to include the Airbus consortium. The move would give Daimler-Benz Aerospace and CASA of Spain a role in the AE-100 project, in addition to those of Aerospatiale, Alenia and British Aerospace.

It would also enable the AE-100 to become part of the Airbus

product range, strengthening worldwide marketing and after-sales support for the aircraft. Talks are focused on establishing system commonality with A320 family, such as that of cockpit avionics, which would extend Airbus cross-crew qualification to the AE-100.

At the same time, Airbus wants to avoid any market overlap between the new aircraft and its A320 series. The AE-100 programme is planned to include a stretched 135- to 140-seat version, which potentially could pose a threat to the smaller 124-seat A319.

AVIC claims that there would be major differences between the two aircraft. The AE-100 cabin will contain five-abreast seating, compared to the wider A320's six-abreast cabin cross-section. Its design will also be optimised to allow it to be operated on routes of 500-1,500km (270-800nm), instead of competing with the longer-range A320.

A Chinese source emphasises that Airbus' role in AIA is intended

to complement that of AI(R) and not replace it. AVIC is keen to emulate Avro's "lean-and-mean" type of approach to manufacturing, rather than the more cumbersome and costly production structure in operation at Airbus.

Agreement on Airbus' involvement will clear the way for China, Europe and Singapore to finalise the programme's shareholding arrangements. One official suggests that, with the addition of Deutsche Aerospace, AIA's stake could be increased from 40% to 45%, leaving AVIC with a nominally larger 46% share and ST with 9%.

The joint venture is expected to be formalised by the end of the year, with preliminary-design work starting in January 1997. Its immediate task will be to negotiate risk and revenue-sharing agreements with suppliers.

Manufacturers will be awarded work packages and given overall responsibility for selected areas, such as engine and nacelle, landing gear and fuel system. □

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