

# Prestwick seeks new work after J41 closure

KEVIN O'TOOLE/LONDON

BRITISH AEROSPACE has signalled its final exit from turboprop regional-aircraft production, with the announcement that it is to close the Jetstream 41 assembly line at Prestwick, Scotland. The move is being backed by a renewed drive to find replacement aerostructures work for the site.

Production of the J41, and the future of the factory, has been under review for more than a year as orders in the 30-seat-turboprop market dwindled. Production has fallen steadily from a high of 38 aircraft a year in 1995, to a plan for only ten aircraft in 1997.

The backlog fell to almost zero at the end of 1996, before Atlantic Coast Airlines (ACA) placed a "top-up" order for 12 aircraft. Eight of these are still on the books, although ACA says that it is in talks with BAe and still has "...the flexibility to take the aircraft or not".

The J41 closure marks BAe's final disentanglement from the loss-making turboprop business over the past four years. Production



Prestwick workers lose out as BAe closes down Jetstream 41 production

of the 19-seat J31 effectively ceased in 1993 and the 64-seat ATP/J61 line was abandoned two years later after BAe's agreement to join ATR partners Aerospaciale and Alenia within the Aero International (Regional) consortium. The move leaves the Al(R) Avro RJ regional jet as the only airliner still assembled in the UK.

With profits coming in from

Airbus work and the Avro RJ regional-jet business due to return to break-even this year, the J41 remained the last major cause of losses in BAe's Commercial Aerospace business, which lost another £78 million (\$117 million) in 1996. BAe says that the J41 alone cost it around £40 million in operating losses in 1996. That is equivalent to a loss of some £1 million for

each of the 20 J41s delivered that year, at a list price of £4 million.

BAe says that it will put aside £250 million to close the line, which is expected to result in the loss of 380 jobs at Prestwick out of 600 employed on Jetstream production work. About 150-200 staff will be retained to carry on technical support for Jetstream aircraft.

Another 1,000 jobs at Prestwick will be retained for aerostructures work, which BAe pledges to expand at the site.

Wing assembly for the Avro RJ family was pulled back from the USA and placed at Prestwick in 1995 after announcement of the ATP line's closure. Work on the Nimrod 2000, which requires a new inner wing box section, is also earmarked for the plant, although that is unlikely to start in earnest for another 18 months.

Other options include parts for the Eurofighter 2000 and possibly moving Raytheon Hawker business-jet subassembly work from Chester - although this would still require delicate talks with Raytheon and the Chester unions. □

# Kawasaki delivers first prototype OH-1 helicopter

PAUL LEWIS/GIFU

KAWASAKI HEAVY Industries (KHI) has delivered its first XOH-1 prototype scout helicopter to the Japan Defence Agency (JDA), marking a major landmark for the country's first indigenous rotary-wing aircraft development programme.

Japan's parliamentary under-secretary for defence, Katsuhito Asano, used the delivery ceremony to re-affirm Government support for the programme, despite a planned cutback in defence expenditure. He gave no indication, however, of the total number of tandem-seat OH-1s the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force (JGSDF) planned to acquire.

The JDA has already secured sufficient funds in this year's budget to order an initial three production helicopters and is requesting additional funding in fiscal year 1998 to purchase a further five



JDA takes over the controls of XOH as Kawasaki pushes ahead with testing

machines. It is unclear whether the JGSDF will be able to order sufficient numbers of OH-1s to replace its fleet of 185 Kawasaki/McDonnell Douglas OH-6Ds on a one-for-one basis.

Handover of the first of four XOH-1 prototypes clears the way for the JDA's Technical Research Development Institute (TRDI) to

begin two years of operational testing, which will include environmental testing and expansion of the basic flight envelope. KHI plans to deliver the remaining three test helicopters by August.

According to KHI, the four prototypes have now accumulated 150h flight time since the twin-engine type first flew in early

August 1996. An estimated 10h of company flight testing remains to be completed at KHI's Gifu plant, before the last XOH-1 is delivered to the JGSDF's Akeno AB and responsibility passes to the TRDI.

The lead prototype has undergone 50h of performance validation, reaching a speed of 120kt (200km/h) and a maximum design altitude of 10,000ft (3,000m). The twin-turbine helicopter has also been engaged in single-engine tests and emergency autorotation descents.

KHI's second XOH-1 has accumulated 40h of load and vibration testing, while a third prototype has amassed a similar amount of flight time during functional tests of navigation, communication and sensor systems. The fourth machine is being used for mission adaptability and weapon handling, such as lock-on tests using the Toshiba Type 91 infra-red air-to-air missile which will arm the OH-1. □