

## Counter-suit filed in dispute over two-seat sport design

A SECOND LAW SUIT has been filed in the continuing clash between US manufacturers Aviat Aircraft and Roy LoPresti over a new two-seat sport aircraft based on a 1946 Globe Aircraft design.

The legal dispute began in April, when Aviat filed an infringement suit against LoPresti claiming that LoPresti's SwiftFury single violates trade mark and "trade dress" laws. The Afton, Wyoming-based company objected to the use of the title SwiftFury and the physical form of the aircraft. LoPresti has renamed the aircraft the Fury.

In mid-June, Vero Beach, Florida-based LoPresti responded with a counter law suit alleging that Aviat illegally appropriated design data and parts from the original LoPresti Piper SwiftFury design for its 135kW (180hp) two-seat Millennium Swift.

"The LoPresti derivative's resemblance to the original Swift and Aviat's Millennium Swift [both licensed to Aviat] is enough to create market confusion," says Aviat owner and president Stuart Horne. "This issue is comparable to what would happen if Pepsi bottled its beverage in a container shaped like the original Coca-Cola bottle."

Aviat concedes that, although the products might differ internally, the outside appearance is so similar that there could be confusion. The Millennium Swift and LoPresti Fury are due for certification in the first and fourth quarter of 2001, respectively.

Meanwhile, Aviat plans to display for the first time its Monocoupe 110 Special at the Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture '99 convention later this month. The single-engine aircraft, a revival of the 1930s' Monocoupe 10 racer, is powered by a 150kW (200hp) fuel-injected Textron Lycoming IO-360 and has a projected cruise speed of 160kt (300km/h). Aviat also plans to install a full gyro panel and a modern avionics suite.

Certification and first delivery are planned for the fourth quarter of the year. □

# Bell considers 206 upgrade and ponders plans to modify 412Plus

PAUL LEWIS/WASHINGTON DC

BELL IS considering improving its 206 helicopter, rather than developing an all-new replacement to compete with the Eurocopter EC120. In the meantime, the company expects to decide before the end of the year on a 412Plus upgrade.

"We're looking at enhancements to the 206. We're not looking at a brand-new entry level aircraft. It would be similar to what we would do to the 412Plus, where we would take a look at upgrading the engine, transmission and dynamics," says Bell chairman Terry Stinson.

Unlike the proposed Bell 412Plus, however, the company does not envisage making major changes to the smaller 206's cockpit. A survey of operators reveals that most would not support a substantial increase in the single-engine machine's \$750,000 baseline price.

"About 80-90% of operators said they were happy with the 206 and would like an enhanced version



Bell's customers want improvements to the 206

of the helicopter, but not if it costs substantially more money. It's got to be \$900,000 or less, otherwise there is going to be no interest," says Stinson.

Bell decided not to develop an all-new design because of the impact of the competing EC120, which it says is not the threat it had feared. "It doesn't offer substantial improvements in operating performance over the 206. Most of our

operators buy on costs and productivity and we really haven't lost anything to the 120," claims Stinson.

The 412Plus would entail a more extensive revamp, including uprated twin Pratt & Whitney PT6C turboshaft engines, all new dynamics and Rogerson Kratos avionics. The helicopter would be priced at \$4-4.5 million and be aimed at 412 operators that want commonality and which are not prepared to spend another \$2 million on the new Bell Agusta AB139.

"We're going to make a decision between now and probably the end of the year. If we do a 412Plus, we'll do it

as part of the Bell Agusta joint venture. It will fit in between the 412 and AB139," says Stinson. "Preliminary figures show a substantial improvement in performance over the 412," he adds.

The company has a 25% stake in the 12/15-seater and has set an end of year target for a decision on the location of its AB139 final assembly line in North America to complement the Vergiate, Italy line. □

## Gulfstream deliveries launch NetJets Middle East

NATIONAL AIR Services (NAS) has taken delivery of its first Gulfstream IVSP core aircraft, launching the NetJets Middle East programme. "The first customer-owned aircraft will arrive at the end of July but, having just received Part 135 approval, which allows us to operate commercially, we are essentially ready to begin operations now," says NAS director general Mohammed Al-Zeer.

NetJets Middle East is a joint venture between Jeddah, Saudi Arabia-based NAS, supplying administrative and financial backing, Gulfstream, supplying the aircraft, and fractional ownership pioneer Executive Jet (EJI), pro-

viding operational expertise and pilotage. It will operate 14 GIVSPs, including four core aircraft, over the next three years. "We have sold our first aircraft and are confident of selling the concept to companies and private individuals throughout the region," adds Al-Zeer.

NetJets Middle East plans to place a range of aircraft, including mid-size Cessna Citation Excels, Raytheon Hawker 800XPs, super mid-size Hawker Horizons and long-range Gulfstream Vs.

EJI recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Boeing covering an order for up to five Boeing Business Jets and an option for three more.

Al-Zeer predicts that within five years the venture will have more than 40 aircraft servicing 300 customers around the region. "Improving economic conditions and increasing foreign investment in countries like Egypt are creating wealthy individuals for whom fractional ownership would be ideal," he adds.

NAS is also targeting business aircraft owners in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, which have the largest concentration of business jets in the world.

"We believe that owners of multiple aircraft may decide to sell a number and turn to fractional ownership to ease the financial burden," says Al-Zeer. □