

Reims analyses demand for Western version of An-140

FRANCOIS LEGROS/PARIS

FRENCH LIGHT aircraft manufacturer Reims Aviation is evaluating the market for a possible Westernised version of the Antonov An-140 turboprop.

Reims Aviation sales manager François Billet says the company's relationship with the Ukrainian design bureau Antonov is "very close" and that it is "undertaking a market analysis" to examine the possibility of producing a Westernised version. The result would be a "35-seat aircraft which would be similar to a Fokker F27", he says.

The Westernised An-140 would probably be produced in Antonov's Kiev, Ukraine, plant, although Billet stresses: "Nothing has been decided. Our examination is at a preliminary stage."

It is understood the airframe is likely to remain the same as that of the An-140, but the interior and engines would be upgraded. The two 1,840kW (2,465hp) Motor Sich TV3-117s are considered inefficient and would be replaced by more advanced 2,055kW Pratt & Whitney Canada PW127s.

The move comes as Russian manufacturer Aviacor prepares to

invest \$20 million to underwrite series production of the An-140 at Samara (*Flight International*, 8-14 December, P17). Designed as a replacement for Russia's ageing Antonov An-24 fleet, the An-140 first flew in August 1997. The first production example is expected to be completed next July. Iran has already signed an assembly deal with Antonov for the An-140.

Reims Aviation undertook the market study after one of its test pilots, Paul Roux, flew the aircraft at Kiev. This was the first time that the An-140 had been flown by a Western pilot. □

Study claims NTSB is 'stretched to limit'

THE NATIONAL Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is "stretched to the limit", says a study published by independent consultancy Rand.

Rand was referring particularly to a shortage of personnel. NTSB chairman Jim Hall has accused the US Office of Management and Budget of risking "the safety of the American people" by ignoring repeated requests for more investigative personnel.

The report suggests, however, that the agency is "insular" in its failure to use the expertise in other agencies and universities. □

MARKETPLACE

++ Air Seychelles has signed a 10-year lease deal with ILFC for a General Electric CF6-80C2-powered Boeing 767-300ER, for delivery in April 2001. **++ Swiss charter carrier Edelweiss Air** has agreed to lease a new Airbus A330-200 from **CIT Group** from the fourth quarter of 2000. The Rolls-Royce Trent 772B-powered A330-200 is expected to be Edelweiss Air's first widebodied aircraft. **++ An Air Niugini** plan to wet-lease a Boeing 737-500 from **Ansett Worldwide** for two years has lapsed when the aircraft went to another carrier. The airline seeks a similar arrangement to replace a BAE Systems Avro RJ-70 leased from Adelaide based **National JetSystems**. An airline source says Air Niugini would initially operate the aircraft on a wet lease basis, but would later transfer it to the company's air operator certificate. **++ Iranian carrier Mahan Air** is reported to be acquiring three ex-Thai International Airbus A300B4 freighters (including a convertible) from **AR Aviation** early in 2000. The two full freighters have been converted by BAE Systems. **++ C-S Aviation** has sold two Maersk Air Fokker 50 turboprops to Elmo Ventures on behalf of QIP Aviation. **++ Air Botswana** has leased three ATR 42-500s from Air Littoral. The aircraft will be used to rebuild its fleet, following its destruction in October when a pilot deliberately crashed one of the airline's ATRs into the others. □

Custom eyes TriStar conversions



Custom may turn some of its ex-Saudi TriStars into freighters or tankers

CUSTOM AIR Transport is confident it can find customers to allow 10 of the 16 Lockheed L-1011 TriStar 200s it acquired from Saudi Arabian Airlines to be converted into either commercial freighters or military tankers. Custom Air believes it could place some aircraft with passenger airlines.

The Fort Lauderdale-based company has offered some of the aircraft to the four consortia com-

peting for the UK future strategic tanker aircraft (FSTA) requirement. The company aims to convert between six and 10 to cargo configuration, and keep one or two in passenger configuration for lease. The rest will be used for spares, says Custom Air general manager Richard Wellman.

"We're in constant conversation with Lockheed Martin [which recently relaunched the TriStar conversion programme using

Marshall Aerospace's certificate] and Marshall and certain other repair stations about conversions to freighters," says Wellman. "We've also talked to all four consortia, including BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Flight Refuelling and Circle, about the L-1011 as an alternative solution to FTSA."

The UK Royal Air Force already operates nine TriStar 500 transports converted by Marshall Aerospace, including tankers and cargo door-equipped models.

"We've identified customers that would have a general need for freighters and are focusing on a McDonnell Douglas DC-8 replacement," says Wellman.

Fine Air and Kittyhawk operate TriStar freighters and are thought to have held talks with Custom Air. In the meantime, the aircraft remain stored in Saudi Arabia.

Also parked are eight Boeing 737-200s that Custom has bought from the Saudi carrier. The company's plan is to sell the aircraft directly to an operator with minimum alteration. This leaves the carrier with 11 more 737s, some of which it cannot replace with new Boeing MD-90s because of airfield restrictions. □