

FOCUS: LATIN AMERICA

senger aircraft, Enaer is looking at more new overhaul and maintenance opportunities at Santiago's main Arturo Merino Benitez Airport. "We're talking about co-operation with LanChile and establishing a major new hangar at the airport for servicing large civil and military aircraft," Guzman reveals.

Deep in the fertile farmlands and rich grasslands of Argentina's pampas, meanwhile, the LMAAS Cordoba factory seems an unlikely place for a veritable aerospace revolution. Yet, filled to the brim with testing and manufacturing equipment of which most companies can only dream, this is the intended centrepiece of LMAAS' bid to become the premier aerospace provider in Latin America.

ARGENTINIAN JEWEL

"This facility is really the crown jewel in the whole Argentinian aviation/military complex," says LMAAS president James Taylor, who has been at the helm of the company's Latin American venture since the former government complex was privatised in July 1995. Although LMAAS was formed around the company's hard-won McDonnell Douglas A-4AR upgrade contract for the Argentinian air force, the victory provided it with something even more worthwhile in the long term – a springboard from which to hit new markets with new products and services in Latin America and elsewhere.

Lockheed Martin's bid for the A-4 work dovetailed with strategic plans to expand its global network of sites to include a Latin American stronghold. Taylor adds: "Part of the vision was to build an aviation centre of excellence down here in South America. We already had pretty good experience in China and Saudi Arabia and this was the next logical step in terms of the maintenance and overhaul business. By getting this site, we also got a couple of extra benefits, including a vast manufacturing site and engine overhaul facility."

The Cordoba site encompasses a bewildering range of capabilities under its 220,000m² (2.3 million ft²) roof. Massive, 18m (60ft) numerically controlled three- and five-axis machines, automatic lathes and milling and welding machines sit alongside autoclaves, clean rooms and ultrasonic inspection systems. In adjoining parts of the 200Ha (495 acre) site, supersonic and transonic windtunnels can be found beside ejection seat and parachute packaging lines. Sited close to nearby air force academies and training schools, LMAAS also has access to one of the most vital resources of all: more than 1,000 trained staff.

"They are probably one of the best trained labour forces I have come across anywhere in the world," says Taylor, who adds that the all-embracing Cordoba site is no accident. Fearing technical isolation through embargos from the

USA and other Western nations in the wake of a military coup, it was forced to develop its own in-house expertise.

Having completed the initial A-4AR upgrade work, as well as other Argentinian air force modification and maintenance contracts, LMAAS is preparing to attack the global marketplace with three main lines of business: civil and military maintenance and upgrades, manufacturing and engine repair and overhaul. All three initiatives build on the solid base of existing, or recently completed, work for the Argentinian defence department – particularly in the military aircraft maintenance and modification arena. Now the funding that supported so much activity is diminishing, and the hunt is on for new work.

LMAAS quickly discovered that it takes more than an impressive line-up of equipment and staff to secure new business in the hotly contested global market. "It was very obvious when we went looking for manufacturing work in Germany that we had to have ISO9001, for example," says Taylor, referring to the international quality assurance standard. The company underwent an audit by Germany's TUV and was awarded the qualification last August. To support its long-term commercial maintenance and modification ambitions, LMAAS also undertook a similar initiative to obtain Argentinian civil repair station certification for 737 and other work.

"We've laid out big plans for the 737 here," says Taylor, who believes the first aircraft could arrive at the site's dedicated 1,725m-long runway by late April. The company is in talks with domestic and international carriers about supporting in Cordoba many of the 737s that are sent for maintenance to Brazil and El Salvador. The 737 fleet is the fastest-growing in Argentina, with Aerolineas Argentinas taking ex-British Airways-200s, through its absorption of Austral, and LAPA to double its 737-700 fleet over the next two years.

Taylor believes local labour costs will allow LMAAS' 737 work to be competitively priced, but warns that value will remain the top priority, regardless of cost. "We can't, and won't, compete with rinky-dink 'mom and pop' operations with moonlighting military people and no technical manuals between them. We have started dialogues with airlines in all parts of Latin America and we are doing everything we can to make sure it will go through clean," he adds.

While it prepares for the 737, LMAAS is not neglecting its military role, and continues to support the Argentinian air force's Fokker F27s, C-130s and Beech T-34 trainers, as well as the FMA IA58 Pucarás and IA63 Pampas, built at the Cordoba site. It hopes to begin upgrading the C-130s this year – mostly standardising the cockpits and electrical systems of the force's var-



ious C-130 models to a new "H" configuration. The advanced flightdeck will be based on new flat panel displays and an avionics suite including global positioning system (GPS), traffic collision avoidance system, ground proximity warning and an emergency locator transmitter.

ADVANCED COCKPIT UPGRADES

Advanced cockpit upgrades are also proposed for the Pucara and Pampa. LMAAS' bid for the Pucara is based around a new horizontal situation indicator (HSI), attitude direction indicator (ADI), radio magnetic indicator, new navigation/communications radios, GPS and radar altimeter. A range of options has been proposed for the Pampa, much of which could depend on funding for a related bid to restart production of the advanced jet trainer and light attack aircraft. Options cover upgrading the 10 aircraft in service, plus baseline specifications for up to 12 new aircraft already budgeted, and a further 24 that may be sanctioned this year.

The new cockpit is also being proposed for the Pampas offered for advanced trainer com-

"Over the past two decades, Chile has emerged in a strong position and we can offer our knowhow to other South American countries" – Brig Gen Alfredo Guzman, Enaer executive director