

Bombardier launches CRJ900

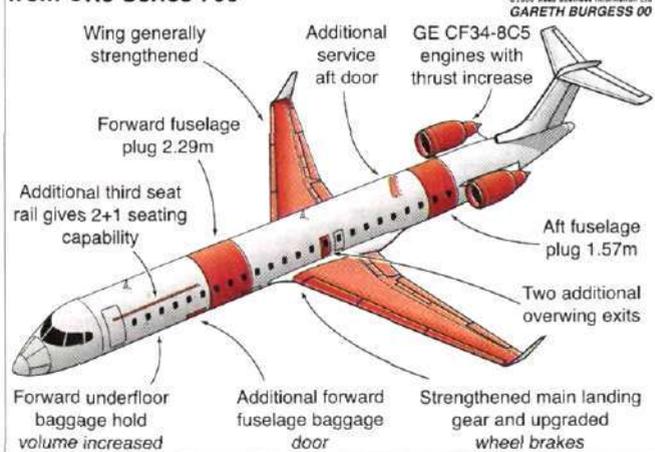
BOMBARDIER has begun low-risk, fast-track development of the 86-seat CRJ900 following board approval to launch the stretched derivative on the back of tentative orders for 50 aircraft, including commitments from Air Nostrum and Tyrolean Airways.

The Canadian manufacturer is targeting the first flight of a CRJ900 development aircraft within 12 months. It hopes to complete testing and secure initial Transport Canada type certification by the third quarter of 2002 and deliver the first production aircraft by the end of that year.

"This is not earth-shattering in terms of development," says Steve Ridolfi, Bombardier president regional aircraft. "We've kept the same partners and are keeping it simple. The CRJ700 was the big mid-platform change transitioning from a small to a big jet; the CRJ900 is an incremental jet."

Bombardier is projecting a total development cost of CS200 million (\$135 million) for the regional jet – considerably less than was spent on redesigning and stretch-

Bombardier CRJ Series 900 changes from CRJ Series 700



ing the CRJ700. It hopes to steal a lead by having the CRJ900 in service two years ahead of the rival, all-new Embraer ERJ-190 and Fairchild Dornier 928JET models.

The announced commitments comprise 12 for Tyrolean and eight for Air Nostrum – both CRJ200 operators – along with a recently announced order from GE Capital Aviation Services for 10 aircraft and 20 options. The Austrian and

Spanish deals are each subject to airline board approval. "There are others we hope to have in place shortly," says Ridolfi.

Work on the aircraft is already under way, with Bombardier having completed a joint definition phase with its partners and frozen the design in May. The forward and aft fuselage plugs, measuring 2.3m (90in) and 1.6m respectively, have also been completed and will be

mated with a CRJ700 test aircraft to create the prototype CRJ900.

A second, all-new CRJ900 development aircraft and the first to be powered by the General Electric CF34-8C5 growth engine, will roll out in mid-2002. "The modified CRJ700 will fly as an aerodynamic prototype, while the second aircraft will basically clean up and test systems," says Ridolfi.

The line-up of partners and suppliers is essentially unchanged from the CRJ700, with the exception of Gamesa building the vertical and horizontal stabiliser in place of Avcorp. Shorts will supply the mid-fuselage, Mitsubishi the aft fuselage, GKN Westland the tail cone, Hamilton Sundstrand the flaps and slats, and Bombardier will produce the rest of the main structure.

In addition to the extra fuselage barrels and uprated 14,500lb (65kN)-thrust powerplant, the principal changes centre on a reinforced wing, an additional under-floor baggage door, a second pair of overwing exits, an aft service door and strengthened main landing gear and upgraded brakes. □

Thomson Racal wins Eurofighter MSS deal

THOMSON Racal Defence has won a contract to start development of the mission support system (MSS) for the Eurofighter. The deal is expected to be worth more than £20 million (\$30 million).

Racal, a wholly owned UK subsidiary of French electronics conglomerate Thomson-CSF, will be responsible for the mission planning and briefing (MPB) part of the system, which will provide automatic route suggestions from base to target and the return leg, a three-dimensional fly-through, target planning and briefing.

Racal has developed mission planning systems for Royal Air Force Boeing Sentry AEW1 airborne warning and control platform, BAE Systems Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft and Panavia Tornado GR1Bs. □

Rotorcraft production set for major increase

MORE THAN 9,200 rotorcraft, worth more than \$74.5 billion, are expected to be built in the next decade, according to a forecast released at the show by the US-based Teal Group.

This total includes 4,712 civil machines worth \$12.3 billion, and 4,494 military helicopters valued at \$62.2 billion. Teal Group analyst Richard Aboulafia says: "These numbers represent a great improvement over the previous 10 years [1990-1999] when production totalled 8,229 machines worth \$51.3 billion."

The forecast, which provides a comprehensive look at the rotorcraft industry, including tiltrotors, says that the five main rotorcraft manufacturers, Bell, Boeing,

Eurocopter, Sikorsky and Agusta/Westland – "when the merger is finally cemented" – will hold 92% of the world's rotorcraft market during the 2000-9 forecast period.

Aboulafia adds: "Further industry consolidation would be an excellent idea, but European techno-nationalism and over-zealous US regulators basically rule out any further serious consolidation for now, no matter how useful and necessary."

He says that a tie-up between Agusta/Westland and Bell in the next decade, for example, would give the new company a market share of more than 30%. "The prospect of this happening is undoubtedly hastening talks between Sikorsky and Boeing." □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ INFLIGHT ALLIANCE

European space company Astrium and Sextant have entered the crowded in-flight communication market with the launch of a joint project to develop in-flight e-mail and internet-based services for commercial air transport aircraft.

■ QUIET SAABS

Swedish regional Golden Air has converted a letter of intent into a \$750,000 order for UK company Ultra Electronics' UltraQuiet Active Noise Control (ANC) system to retrofit its nine Saab 340s. Golden Air is the launch customer for the retrofits. The Saab 340 ANC system reduces cabin noise to a level equivalent to that in a modern regional jet.