



another 18 months before Airbus was formally created in December 1970. Operating from its Paris base, the Airbus Industrie team set about establishing itself in the market with its new concept – the world's first widebodied twinjet. In so doing, it was launching Europe's comeback in airliner manufacturing.

"The A300 was a marketing bet," says Airbus financial controller Ian Massey, "and the USA thought this was really amusing – a new European consortium with a widebody twin."

Boeing's response to the A300 was to discredit Europe's efforts rather than try to develop a

competing product, says Massey. "We were rather fortunate that the USA underestimated the European threat."

The initial A300B1 version made its first flight from Toulouse on 28 October 1972. The slightly larger B2, which became the standard A300B size, was the first Airbus to enter service – with Air France in 1974. Later, the higher-weight A300B4 provided an increase in range. It became the most popular of the early models.

Although Airbus landed its first major non-European customer, Korean Air, in October 1974, the programme showed signs of plunging into crisis as the world economy slumped after the Middle East oil crisis. "Our sales fell to zero, and output in 1975 and 1976 slumped to one A300 aircraft per month," says Massey. "However, the oil crisis ultimately made the A300 successful because its twin-engined configuration meant it used less fuel than a trijet."

The market picked up in 1977 and the A300, with its superior economics, appeared to be extremely well-suited to the emerging post-crisis market. This was underlined in July 1977, when the A300 won its first North American customer – Eastern Airlines. The little European twinjet had finally touched down in Boeing and McDonnell Douglas' backyard.

The A300 also captured a large chunk of the emerging market in Asia and, says Massey, "by the late 1970s, things were looking much better – the A300 had taken 10% of the market".

Asia provided the launch for Airbus' next technical innovation – the first two-crew flight-deck for a high-capacity airliner, introduced on A300s supplied to Garuda in 1982.

DIVERSIFIED RANGE

With A300 sales booming, Airbus began to consider smaller, larger and longer-range derivatives based on the A300 fuselage. The former, the 210-seat B10, was perceived as being the first requirement for the market, and it entered the fray in 1983 as the A310. The twinjet went into service with a new, two-crew, digital flight-deck equipped with a six-screen electronic flight instrument system. It was also available with engines from GE and Pratt & Whitney from the start.

Significantly, the A310 project was one of two known occasions when Airbus flirted with the idea of linking up with US arch rival Boeing. Discussions between the two companies to develop the aircraft jointly as the BB10 came to nothing, however. Boeing responded with its own widebody twinjet, the 767.

Airbus ploughed the A310's new technology back into the A300 to create the A300-600. This model, slightly larger than the original A300, entered service with Saudi Arabian Airlines in March 1984. A longer-range version, the -600R, was introduced four years later.

"There was another downturn in the mid-1980s, but the market was stimulated

AIRBUS GOES TO WAR

STEWART PENNEY/LONDON

AT LAST YEAR'S Farnborough air show, defence ministers from seven European countries announced a procurement plan for 225 Airbus Military Company (AMC) A400M four-engine military airlifters.

In 1998, Airbus took over the management of the former Future Large Aircraft programme, which until then had been overseen by EUROFLAG. Redesignated the A400M, the programme marks Airbus' first step into the military sector.

The partners in AMC reflect the core A400M customers, and includes Belgian (Belairbus), Italian (Alenia) and Turkish (Tusas Aerospace Industries) participation as well as the four Airbus partners. Luxembourg, despite not having an air force, ordered one aircraft last July.

The A400M will be fitted with an Airbus-type two-crew glass cockpit with sidestick control. The high-wing, 37t-payload freighter will be powered by four TP400 turboprops. This three-shaft 7,450-9,760kW (10,000-13,000shp) engine will be developed and produced by FiatAvio, ITP, MTU, Rolls-Royce, Snecma and Techspace Aero.

A launch is expected early this year, with contract signing shortly afterwards. First flight is scheduled to follow 51 months later (ie during 2005), with deliveries of a "logistics aircraft" to the UK Royal Air Force 20 months later.

Despite having seven countries committed, the race for a contract is not complete. The thorny issues of workshare and programme leadership must be finalised. The German-registered management company is based in Munich.

Workshare is always a contentious issue, and the A400M is no exception. Germany, committed to 73 A400Ms, is demanding a 33% share of the programme, but German funding for the A400M, announced last November, was DM10 billion (\$4.4 billion) – some way short of the DM16.8 billion needed to fund 73 aircraft.

The UK is to buy 25 aircraft, or 11% of the total – which is much less than its traditional 20% share in Airbus programmes. When announcing the UK's intent in May, however, UK defence minister Geoff Hoon underlined the importance of R-R and BAE Systems' wing-design work to the UK. A likely compromise is that while the UK will have the wing design lead, Germany will have more wing production.