Air China to target VIPs with business jet division

Carrier will start operations with leased Gulfstream IV and add second type by year-end

Air China plans to launch a corporate jet operation in July with a leased Gulfstream IV and add a second business aircraft type by year-end. The carrier will become the fourth airline in mainland China to operate business aircraft, joining Hainan Airlines, Shandong Airlines and Shanghai Airlines in the burgeoning market.

Air China already provides ground-handling services for foreign business aircraft in Beijing. Quisheng Chang, who is familiar with corporate jet services from heading this ground handling operation, has been appointed to lead Air China Business Jet.

Air China’s parent, China National Aviation Holding, created the China National Business Jet subsidiary earlier this year. But Air China officials say that last month CNAC decided to fold the new unit under Air China and is now seeking government approval to call it Air China Business Jet.

Air China has agreed to become Gulfstream’s first Chinese operator and has sent some of its Boeing 737 and 747 pilots to the USA for training on the Gulfstream IV. Several other business aircraft manufacturers also held preliminary discussions with Air China, but say they could not match the one-year lease deal offered by Gulfstream. Chang continues to evaluate several other aircraft — including those of Boeing, Bombardier, Cesna and Raytheon — and the carrier hopes to begin operating a second type in December.

Gulfstream says it is offering Air China the option to purchase the G200, G300 or G400. Air China will see how the new operation fares before deciding on a permanent fleet.

The carrier wants to shuttle VIPs domestically and overseas and is looking at both the government and private sectors. But Chinese industry officials say the Gulfstream IV is too small for most government delegations, which rely on Challenger 800s (the corporate version of the CRJ) and 737 operated by the government’s China United Airlines.

Officials expect Air China Business Jet to compete primarily with Rainbow Jet, which Shandong launched last year with two Challenger 604s. Hainan and Shanghai operate Raytheon Hawker 800s.

ACCIDENT

SJ30-2 in barrel roll before crash

Sino-Swearingen’s first prototype SJ30-2 crashed on the second in a series of flutter certification flight tests, but the aircraft appeared to remain intact all the way to the ground, says the US National Transportation Safety Board. The crash, on 26 April, near Loma Alta, Texas, killed test pilot Carroll Beeler.

On the second test run of the day, in a shallow dive at Mach 0.884, the aircraft began an uncommanded barrel roll to the right that the pilot could not stop. The aircraft entered a descending barrel roll, with the g force preventing the pilot bailing out and the dive angle increasing until ground impact.

According to the NTSB’s preliminary report, the first flutter mission, on the previous day, was terminated after an uncommanded roll to the left at an indicated Mach 0.855, in conjunction with a rumble thought to be Mach buffet. After the flight, Beeler realised he had incorrectly set the airspeed display, so it had read Mach 0.86 when the airspeed measured by the chase aircraft was Mach 0.875.

After take-off on the second flutter mission, the SJ30-2 climbed to 39,000ft (11,900m) and entered a shallow dive. Beeler first duplicated the previous day’s flight, making single-pulse aileron, elevator and rudder inputs at Mach 0.875. There was no uncommanded roll and no mention of rumble, says the NTSB.

At the next test point, Mach 0.884, the pilot reported he had put in full trim and could not let go of the controls. Each control surface was pulsed and responses were “well damped”, he said. He was cleared to go to Mach 0.894, but reported the aircraft was rolling to the right and he could not stop it. The crew of the chase aircraft said the SJ30-2 entered a “barrel-roll type manoeuvre” which continued to ground impact.

RESHUFFLE

Jet Aviation makes more managerial changes

Thomas Hirschmann has resigned as chief executive of Jet Aviation after more than 29 years with the family-owned company. No reason has been given. Hirschmann is replaced in the interim by former chief operating officer Heinz Köhli.

The resignation is the latest in a number of management changes at the West Palm Beach, Florida-based business aviation service provider and its Swiss parent company. Hirschmann Industrial Holding, Rita Hirschmann, widow of Jet Aviation founder Carl Hirschmann, has taken over from Montz Suter as chairman of Hirschmann Industrial. The former Crossair regional airline founder was appointed to the post only last month.

Meanwhile, the company has expanded its European and US charter fleets, adding a Challenger 600, Gulfstream III and IV and two Hawker 700s to its fleet based at Dallas, Texas; a Challenger 601 to the Dulles, Virginia, fleet; a GIV at West Palm Beach, Florida; and a Dassault Falcon 900EX at Cologne, Germany.

IN BRIEF

FIXED BASES SOLD

BBA Group is to add Midcoast Aviation’s St Louis, Missouri, fixed-based operation to the Signature Flight Support chain. Emery Air will buy Raytheon’s Rockford, Illinois, FBO.

MIDCOAST APPROVAL

Midcoast Aviation has received US supplemental type certification for a composite wing fairing for the Dassault 20 and 200 that gives operators an alternative way of complying with an airworthiness directive requiring repetitive inspection of the original aluminium fairing.

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