

production of one Ilyushin Il-76, three Tupolev Tu-204s and three Tu-254s.

A new joint aircraft construction company is to be set up by Russia and Kyrgyzstan to produce the Tupolev Tu-34 and Tu-54 light aircraft. Construction will be undertaken at a former defence plant in Bishkek and will involve a partnership between Tupolev and the Dastan corporation, a Kyrgyz company which currently manufactures road vehicles. Setting up production will cost £32 million for the six/seven-seat twin-turboprop Tu-34 light utility transport and £8 million for the Tu-54.

USA

McDonnell Douglas is looking at offering the market a freighter version of its proposed MD-11 stretch (*Airscene*, May, p263) later this year with a view to officially launching it 12 months later. In freighter configuration, the stretch would enable carriage of an 112-tonne payload compared to 85 tonnes in the current aircraft. The company has also refined its plans for the stretched and long-range versions of the MD-11, which are now being referred to under the MD-XX designation, with the long-range variant designated the MD-XXLR. The stretched MD-XX would seat 375 passengers whilst the standard length MD-XX would be a 305-seat aircraft with a range of around 14,825km (8,000nm). In addition, McDonnell Douglas is also examining the possibility of launching a commercial freight version of the C-17A Globemaster III. Dubbed the MD-17, it would be demilitarised by removing structural strengthening for air-dropping and air-to-air refuelling equipment, enabling a larger payload to be carried, probably increased from 74,900kg (165,123lb) to nearly 81,700kg (180,115lb), whilst range could also be increased by about 2,780km (1,500nm).

After several years of undertaking successful conversions of Boeing 747-100 and -200 aircraft into freighter configuration, Boeing Commercial Airplane Group's Wichita Division is now offering freighter conversions of the 747-300. Modification work will be similar to that on earlier conversions, including removal of all passenger provisions, installation of a large side cargo door, main deck strengthening and installing a powered cargo handling system. Modifications can be completed in about three months — KLM announced its intention to convert two Srs 300s to freighters in February, although it has yet to announce which modification centre will undertake the work, scheduled for 1998.

Cessna's Citation X business jet has received FAA certification

testing, involving three aircraft in 3,000 hours of flying. Certification was granted on June 3 and deliveries were scheduled to begin in late June, with the first going to golfer Arnold Palmer, whilst European certification is due in July 1997.

Stavatt Corporation of Eagan, Minnesota, despite being founded on July 20, 1994 as a company dedicated to the design and production of certified general aviation and military aircraft, has remained a virtual unknown in the field. However, Stavatt announced on June 7 that, after five years work, it has reached the advanced design stage of a single-engined multi-role combat aircraft, project 26424, christened the Stalma. Configuration has now been frozen and a pre-production prototype is due to debut in late 1997. The Stalma is designed for high manoeuvrability within the subsonic regime, low operating cost and a high degree of low observability. It features a mission-adaptive, variable-geometry wing, quadruplex fly-by-light control system and advanced composite construction. The Stalma will be powered by a 155kN (35,000lb) thrust class augmented turbofan, have a maximum speed of Mach 2.4+ at 35,000ft (10,500m) and maximum gross take-off weight of 20,870kg (46,000lb). Dimensions will be a length of 15.16m (49ft 9in) and wingspan of 17.45m (57ft 3in) at 5° sweep and 8.89m (29ft 2in) at 75° sweep. Armament will include one 20mm cannon and one gimballed, retractable, rearward-facing chain gun as fixed armament plus two to eight air-to-air missiles as standard ordnance and up to 9,525kg (21,000lb) of external stores.

CIVIL AFFAIRS

AFGHANISTAN

Afghan warlord General Aborrashid Dostum has reportedly established his own airline to compete with national carrier Ariana Afghan, according to a report in *The Muslim* on June 11. Called Balkh Airline, it has apparently acquired five unspecified aircraft from sources in Russia, the UK and Uzbekistan. Both passenger and freight services from his stronghold at Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan to Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia republics are due to commence shortly.

AUSTRALIA

An interesting new use for old airliners has been found in Australia — *Australian Aviation* reports that two of the four former Majestic Airways Mohawk 298s (converted Nord 262As), which have all been in store since the airline's demise in March 1995, are to be sunk off

for fish! The remaining two will serve slightly less bizarre purposes, one being converted to living quarters and the other being mounted on a pole as an advertising hoarding.

ESTONIA

A consortium led by Maersk Air is to take a 66% majority stake in Estonian Airlines after beating off a competing bid from SAS. Final details are still subject to negotiation but it is planned to return Estonian to profitability within two to three years and replace the remaining Soviet-era types with further Western aircraft. Maersk will also begin schedules between its Billund hub and Tallinn to feed eastbound passengers onto Estonian flights.

FRANCE

It was announced on June 5 that a site has been chosen for the third Paris airport. The location is at Beauvilliers, near Chartres, some 80km (50 miles) southwest of Paris. At this stage however, although land will now be bought up at the location, a decision on whether the project will go ahead is still to be made.

HONDURAS

Having abandoned plans for a restart following suspension of operations on January 15, 1994, and subsequent bankruptcy, national carrier SAHSA auctioned off its last three aircraft on June 6 — a Boeing 737-243, Douglas DC-3 and L-188 Electra. The airline, founded in 1946, got into financial difficulties partly because of compensation payments to the families of the 133 who died when one of its aircraft crashed in 1989, which also resulted in high insurance rates. After that the airline operated leased Boeing 737s until its final demise.

INDIA

Lufthansa has decided to sever its links with Indian regional carrier Modiluft, which it helped set up in 1993 with leasing and support agreements (*Airscene*, May 1993, p214). The decision was reportedly due mainly to financial constraints. The German carrier will now seek the return of the three 737-230s which it supplied to Modiluft on five-year leases. Modiluft also operates another 737-230 leased from Lufthansa Leasing and three 737-4Y0s leased from GE Capital.

INTERNATIONAL

An alliance was announced on June 11 between American Airlines and British Airways which will create the world's largest air route network. The move has however caused immediate concern within the airline industry about competitiveness because of the growing trend towards domination

Subject to regulatory approvals, the two airlines plan to complete their alliance by next April, although it falls far shorter of the expectations of it being a virtual merger. The deal involves co-ordination of transatlantic schedules to minimise overlap (but no reduction in the number of flights, the combined total of which is some 488 per week), code-sharing and combined frequent flyer programmes. Between them the two airlines will then control 60% of UK-US traffic.

JAPAN

After an association which began over 30 years ago, Japan Air System has finally retired its last NAMC YS-11 (see article on p22). Formerly known as TOA Domestic Airways and originally just TOA Airways, the carrier took delivery of its first YS-11 on April 10, 1965 and at its peak in 1980 had no less than 42 in service. Retirements and disposals have slowly dwindled this number and latterly the airline has owned 12 YS-11A-500s and three YS-11-100s — all the Srs 500s are leased to subsidiary Japan Air Commuter and the three Srs 100s have also now been withdrawn from use.

KAZAKHSTAN

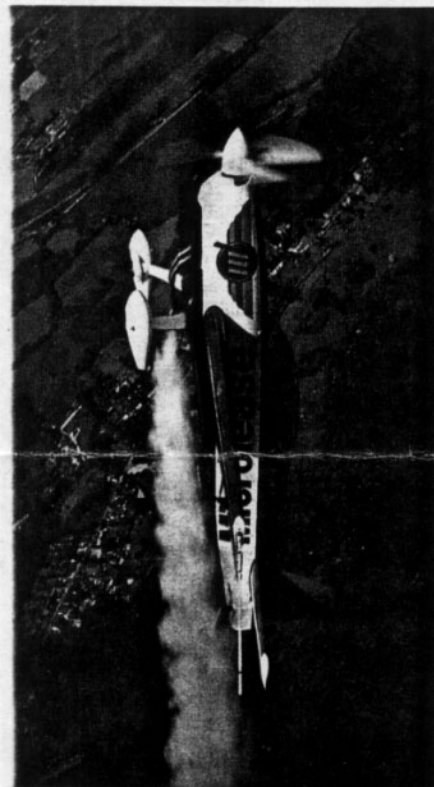
A new Kazakh airline, Asya Servis Aue Zholy (Asia Service Airlines) has been set up as a joint venture by several firms including Russia's Transaero airline and the Kazakhstan Caspian Shelf oil consortium to service the region's oil industry. Flights are already being operated to the west Kazakh oil centres of Atyrau and Aktau and regular scheduled and charter flights are planned throughout the republic. The airline also plans to obtain Boeing aircraft to operate flights to Aktyubinsk, Akmola, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malaysia and the UK.

SOUTH AFRICA

Previous rumours that British Airways (BA) was to sign another franchise agreement with an international partner (*Airscene*, June, p328) were confirmed on June 12 when the airline announced a tie-up with the South African regional carrier Comair. The Johannesburg-based airline will remain a separate South African company but its fleet of ten aircraft will all now appear in BA livery and staff will wear BA uniforms whilst flights will link into BA's southern Africa network. The agreement comes into effect in October.

UK

New London City-based carrier World Airlines (*Airscene*, December 1995, p328) commenced services on May 13 when it operated its first four-times daily services to Amsterdam. Initial equipment is a



Above: Latest addition to Brian Lecomber's well-established Firebird Aerobatics display aircraft is the brand new Extra 300L G-MIII sponsored by Microlease, seen here just passing the vertical in a loop near Denham during a demonstration flight on June 12. Firebird's Extra 300 duo, sponsored by Rover and MG, became established on the display circuit last year but the new Extra 300L is the first in the UK. This latest variant features a new low-wing in place of the previous mid-wing layout, making for much better visibility, a slightly shorter fuselage, increased span ailerons and a number of other refinements. Its performance is even better than the earlier models, with a roll rate in excess of 400° per second whilst the airframe is stressed to plus/minus 23G, although limited to plus/minus 10 for a single pilot and plus/minus 8 with a passenger. (Dave Allport)

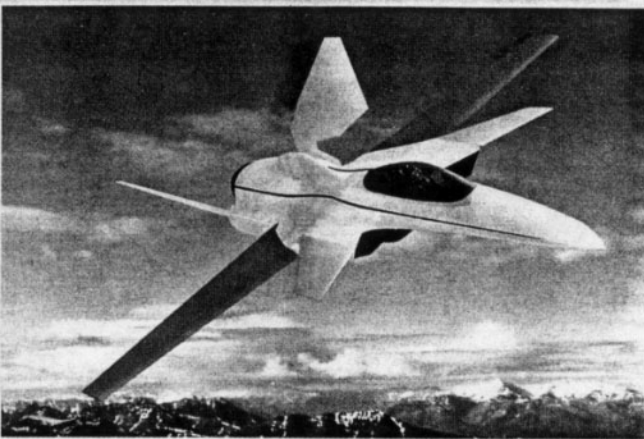
(JEFTS) operation at Barkston Heath, the new JEFTS contract will commence on July 8, when the first T67M-260s will also enter service. Hunting has already increased its fleet to 18 of the older model Fireflies, following the acquisition of two former Hong Kong Government Flying Service aircraft earlier this year. By December 2, 1996, when the Royal Navy also joins the programme, 12 of the planned 25-27 examples of the T67M-260 should be in service. Its main advantage over the older model is that the more powerful engine allows a faster climb to operating altitude, allowing more time for training, an important aspect in today's cost-efficient climate. All of the JEFTS Fireflies

will be painted in a new high-conspicuity colour scheme comprising black undersurfaces with yellow/black top surfaces. Once deliveries have been completed, eight of the older aircraft will be transferred to the AAC School of Aviation at Middle Wallop to replace Chipmunks currently used to grade prospective Army pilots. Operations there should commence in April 1997. It is then being proposed that the remaining ten 'old' Fireflies will join the AEFs at Benson and Newton where they will be evaluated as replacements for the Bulldogs. Military flying training includes low flying and formation flying, which brought much debate as to whether some or all of these aircraft should be operated with military serials. Hunting has no difficulty with this in principle, but there could be substantial extra costs to the Defence budget, which could negate the cost efficiencies brought about by contractisation of elementary flying training. The enlarged fleet of over 40 training aircraft will, therefore, remain on the civil register until the MoD has completed its analysis of the effects of military registration.

Passing almost un-noticed was the **disbandment of 55 (Reserve) Squadron** at Brize Norton on March 31. Acting as the VC10 operational conversion unit using borrowed aircraft from 10 and 101 Squadrons, its role will now be taken over by these two squadrons.

As a prelude to upgrading to reserve squadron status, the **Sea King Training Unit** at RAF St Mawgan was renamed the **Sea King Operational Conversion Unit (SKOCU)** on April 1. Following acceptance tests on the new Sea King HAR.3A at DTEO Boscombe Down, ZH543 flew to St Mawgan on March 5 to begin aircrew conversion to the new variant. Once all six have been delivered to St Mawgan, prior to

Below: Artist's impression of the Stavatti Stalma, an advanced multi-role aircraft design recently unveiled by the American Stavatti Corporation, a company previously unknown in the field. (Photo, Stavatti Corporation)



Top and above: Before and after: Former US Air BAe146-200 N171US in desert storage at Mojave, California, on October 6, 1994, having been there since retirement in May 1991, and, following extensive refurbishment by Marshall Aerospace, as G-DEBA, the first aircraft for new UK carrier Debonair Airways. (Photos, Dave Allport and Norman Pealing)

allocation to 22 Squadron A or B Flights, the SKOCU will increase its Sea King complement to around five and be given reserve squadron status later this year. Although the squadron number is yet to be confirmed, it is thought likely to become 203R Squadron — the unit was last operational with Nimrod MR.1s at Luqa, Malta, but disbanded on December 31, 1977.

A new **Rotary Wing Operational Evaluation Unit (RWOEU)** is to be established at RAF Odiham which, in addition to overseeing the introduction of the EH 101 into service, will also undertake Support Helicopter Force and SAR helicopter operation development work. The RWOEU will come under the command of the Air Warfare Centre,

now headquartered at RAF Waddington.

USA

The first standard length C-130J, N130JC/94-3026 (c/n 5413) for the USAF, has made its first flight. The aircraft was flown from Dobbins AFB, adjacent to the Lockheed Martin Marietta plant, in early June on a six hour 14 minute sortie.

Nearly two years after the last of 209 F-15E Eagles were delivered in July 1994, the USAF awarded an order on May 13 for a further six attrition replacement F-15Es, with plans to follow this up with another twelve, six each in fiscal years 1997 and 1998. Manufacture of the first batch is scheduled to begin in October, with the first delivery expected in November 1998. Production of all 18 aircraft will be completed during 1999, along with the Saudi and Israeli Air Force orders.

Announced by the US Navy on June 7 was a \$404 million contract award to Bell-Boeing for four MV-22A Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft for the US Marine Corps. The four aircraft are expected to be completed by December 1999 — the USMC has a requirement for up to 425 MV-22As (reduced from the original 552) to replace CH-46 Sea Knight and CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopters. The first MV-22B squadron will be VHMT-204 (redesignated from the current HMT-204 with CH-46Es and CH-53Ds) at MCAS New River, North Carolina, which will reach initial