



# ARABIAN AEROSPACE

THE MAGAZINE FOR AEROSPACE PROFESSIONALS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA AND TURKEY

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**TIMES Aerospace Limited**  
 3-4 Rumsey House  
 Locks Hill, Rochford  
 Essex, SS4 1BB  
 UK  
 Tel: +44 (0)1702 53 0000  
 Fax: +44 (0)1702 53 3088

**Regional Office**  
 PO box: 371391  
 Dubai Airport Free Zone  
 Building 6EA, Suite 222,  
 Dubai  
 United Arab Emirates  
 Tel: +971 4 603 3364

Website: www.arabianaerospace.aero

**Directors:**

Mark Brown & Kevin Sammon

**Publisher:**

Mark Brown  
 mark.brown@arabianaerospace.aero

**Display Advertising:**

Nick Hutchins  
 nick.hutchins@arabianaerospace.aero  
 Dave Winship-Evans  
 david.evans@arabianaerospace.aero

**Production Coordinator:**

Claire Silva  
 claire.silva@arabianaerospace.aero

**Circulation Dept:**

Marion Lanham  
 marion.lanham@arabianaerospace.aero

**EDITORIAL**

**Editor:** Alan Peaford

alan.peaford@arabianaerospace.aero

**Deputy Editor:** Marcella Nethersole

ella@aerocomm.aero

**Defence:** Jon Lake

**Air Transport:** Alan Dron

**Business Aviation:** Liz Moscrop

**Helicopters:** Paul Derby

**General Aviation:** Liz Moscrop

**Space:** Steve Nichols

**Aircraft Interiors:** Marcella Nethersole

**MRO & Propulsion:** Geoff Thomas

**Business:** Ian Sheppard

**Airports:** Keith Mwanalushi

**Picture Editor:** Ian Billinghurst

**Photographers:** Paul Merritt; Tom Gordon

**Design:** Chris Murray

**Production Editor:** Rick Haden

**Sub-Editors:** Steve Knight, Kelly Green

**Regional Editors:** Jill Stockbridge (UAE);  
 James Wynbrandt (USA)

**Contributors:** Mohammed Ali Alia, Claire Aphthorp,  
 Kelly Clark, Rob Coppinger, Jeffrey Decker, Alexander Fox,  
 Ian Goold, Jamie Hunter, Martin Rivers, Terry Spruce.

**Editorial head office:**

Aerocomm Ltd, The Gatehouse, 104 Lodge Lane  
 Grays, Essex, RM16 2UL UK.  
 Tel: +44 (0)1375 427014 Fax + 44 (0)1375 404478

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## Passion must be matched by a drive for improvement

**Editor Alan Peaford meets the team from RAK's general aviation company.**

When John Gillespie Magee wrote about having “slipped the surly bonds of Earth” and dancing the skies on “laughter-silvered wings” he struck a chord with generations of aviators – military, commercial or leisure.

Like perhaps no other, the aerospace industry evokes a passion in so many of those involved in it – and none more so than those fortunate enough to slip those bonds and get to fly themselves.

Flying is not only a business; it can be fun too. And once the passion bites then inevitably there is a commitment that stretches into industry.

In this issue of the magazine we look in depth at the northern emirates. The development of Dubai and Abu Dhabi’s aviation industries are well documented and recognised globally. But elsewhere in the UAE, in Sharjah, Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah, there are leaders with unparalleled passion for aerospace, who are behind a drive to grow their involvement in our industry.

And it is happening at that grass roots level too. From the small general aviation airfield in Ras Al Khaimah or the flight academy in Fujairah, which were both founded and funded by members of the

ruling families who wanted to extend their passion for aviation to others, we see examples of the investment and personal support at first hand.

But there is more that could be done.

For grass roots aviators there are massive restrictions that are hindering these efforts.

The UAE does have relatively congested airspace but it should look closely at how it could create safe corridors to allow general aviation to flourish and by so doing, not only set an example to other MENA countries but also help create future generations of pilots, engineers, managers and even business owners and investors.

Elsewhere in the magazine we look at the way Middle Eastern airlines have also adopted a dynamic approach to the use of social media that is leading the way airlines engage with their customers.

Arabian Aerospace and our editorial team are also utilising social media to keep our readers and followers up-to-date with news and views as they happen – we would like to invite you join us.

Safe landings.

**Alan Peaford, Editor-in-chief  
 Arabian Aerospace**

**COVER: RAK Airways CEO John Brayford. Picture: Ian Billinghurst.**

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## Emirates' mobile phone breakthrough

Emirates is offering the world's first in-flight mobile phone service on board an A380 aircraft with connectivity partner, OnAir. The service is in addition to the OnAir WiFi service already available.

The OnAir system allows passengers to use their own mobile phones to make and receive phone calls and text messages, just as they would on the ground, using EDGE/GPRS connections through their mobile service provider.

## Ethiad chalks up record Q3 figures

Ethiad has reported its third-quarter results showing revenues of \$1.3 billion, up 19% on 2011 (\$1.1 billion).

The record income

## Qatar breaks new ground in Oneworld alliance

Qatar Airways is to become the first of the Gulf carriers to be part of a global alliance. CEO Akbar Al Baker (right) announced in New York that the airline would become part of the Oneworld alliance alongside BA and American Airlines.

Becoming the 15th member of the alliance, it will be the second Middle Eastern carrier to join, as Royal Jordanian is already a member.

Analysts are suggesting that this could raise pressure on the region's other top players – Emirates and Etihad – which have both resisted the idea of joining alliances.

Indeed, Etihad has been forming its own virtual alliance with a series of strategic codeshare and equity investment deals with other airlines, while Emirates has always argued that being part of an alliance would weaken its position in a number of markets.



reflected passenger numbers up 23%, with 2.79 million travellers in the quarter (2.27 million).

Seat factors of 81.2% mark its best ever quarterly performance said the airline. Passenger numbers are on track to pass the 10 million milestone in 2012.

Passenger revenues were boosted by codeshare and

partner revenues, which jumped 51% to \$182 million. The airline's 38 partners helped to create a total network of 315 destinations, more than any other Middle Eastern carrier.

A significant contribution came from airberlin, in which Etihad Airways holds a 29.21% equity stake. The

airlines' extensive codeshare and joint marketing agreements have delivered \$51 million in revenues to Etihad to date this year, surpassing the initial full-year estimates.

Etihad Airways and Air France-KLM have signed an historic agreement to codeshare, which the airlines have described as "the first

phase of a much larger strategic partnership."

## It's all positive for Gulf Air

Gulf Air has posted significant improvements in its 2012 half-yearly performance.

CEO Samer Majali said the airline recorded a 6% increase in revenue and a 13% increase in passenger numbers compared to the same period last year. Seat load factor had reached 77% for the same period, registering a 5% growth.

The airline's Falcon Gold premium class alone had seen a healthy 35% growth, while economy class was 12% up over the same period last year.

The airline's on-time punctuality had increased to 79%, as against 78% in 2011 and 74% in 2010, while its technical dispatch reliability had reached 99.4%.

Customer complaints had reduced by 11%.

## Rizon stars with the Argus platinum award

Qatar's private aviation operator, Rizon Jet, has received the ARGUS Platinum rating at its Doha facility.

The rating is the result of independent evaluation and a weeks long audit, carried out by Nexus flight operations services. The Saudi company is a facilitator for the US quality audits in the Middle East region. The facilitator assesses the candidate's flight operations against industry best practices.

Rizon Jet said it is the first and only aircraft charter operator in the Middle East and North Africa to achieve the rating, and CEO Capt. Hassan Al-Mousawi, said: "We are now one of a few platinum rated operators outside the US, and indeed the only one in the MENA region, and are confident this will help us stand out in what is a highly competitive marketplace."

The platinum rating requires a well-developed and fully implemented safety management system, which includes a clear and workable emergency response plan, as well as effective policies, procedures, and record-keeping for all major operational and maintenance aspects.



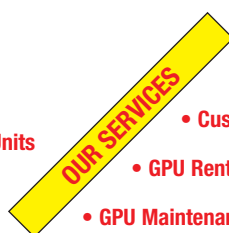
Winning smiles: Abdullah M. Al-Sayed, president & CEO of Nexus; Harold Stoddard, quality & safety manager of Rizon Jet and William Mermelstein VP safety & quality, Nexus.



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## Maroc postpones Dreamliner deliveries

Moroccan national carrier Royal Air Maroc (RAM) is believed to have deferred delivery of its Boeing 787s until at least the end of 2014.

RAM was due to be one of the first recipients of the type with deliveries planned for this year and the aircraft – in RAM colours – has been seen at the Seattle Boeing factory.

But the airline says the postponement is due to a reconfiguration of Boeing's delivery schedule, and that Royal Air Maroc would now be receiving aircraft with better specifications.

Since 2005, RAM has had four General Electric GENx-powered 787-8s on order, plus one additional aircraft on option.

## Qatar Holding takes stake in UK airports

Qatar Holding – a subsidiary of the Qatar sovereign wealth fund – has taken a 20% stake in airport owner and operator BAA, which owns London's Heathrow and Stansted airports, as well as Glasgow and Aberdeen in Scotland and Southampton in the south of England.

## Etihad opens Melbourne facility

Etihad Airways president and chief executive officer, James Hogan, has opened a new line maintenance base in Melbourne.

It is the UAE flag carrier's seventh facility outside Abu Dhabi and its second in Australia.

Three engineers and

three technicians will manage the new maintenance base. The technicians are among 23 trainees that the airline has recruited directly from training organisation, Aviation Australia.

## EgyptAir signs MoU to support Ghana

EgyptAir and the Ghanaian Network Aviation, a leading Ghanaian airline, have signed an MoU, under which they will start a project to promote air transportation expansion in West Africa.

## ADHC eats up growth at Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi Airports Company (ADAC) achieved a record-breaking second quarter revenue growth for

Abu Dhabi Hospitality Company (ADHC), bringing the record for year-to-date sales of food and beverages at Abu Dhabi International Airport to AED38.2 million in the first half of the year, a 47.1% increase compared to the same period in 2011. Passenger growth totalled 22.8% for the first six months of 2012.

## Al Jaber paperless on flight deck

Al Jaber Aviation (AJA) has been granted permanent approval to use the iPad as an electronic flight bag on its fleet of aircraft.

This approval was after a six-month trial period under the supervision of the GCAA. AJA is the first airline in the UAE to gain such approval.

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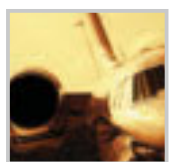
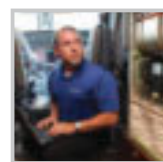
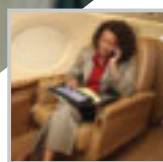
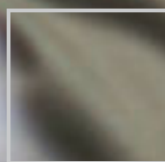
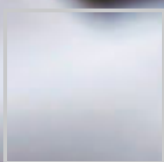
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## Female trainee engineer's award

An Etihad Airways Emirati technical engineering trainee was the recipient of the Abu Dhabi Industry Award for academic excellence, which aims to encourage academic performance in UAE national students.

Muna Mohamed Al Hadharem joined the airline's technical engineering programme in 2009 out of her love for flying and aviation. Her high ambitions, excellent academic and attendance records and perseverance have all been factors in her winning the award.

## Quiet celebration for Emirates

Emirates has been awarded the Jon C Long Fly Quiet Chairperson's Award for 2010-2011 by San Francisco International Airport for demonstrating significant efforts in reducing aircraft noise impacts in the communities surrounding the airport.

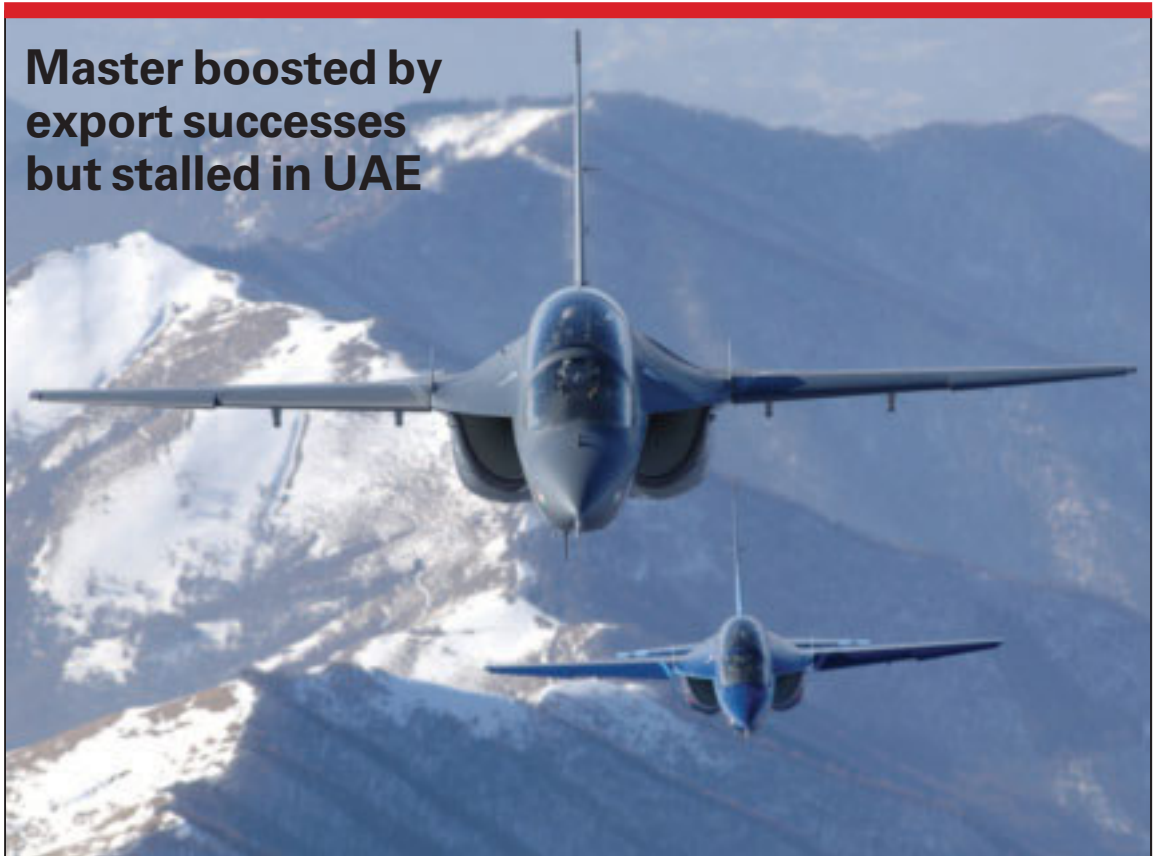
## GAA go ahead for new A330 simulator

Bahrain-based Gulf Aviation Academy (GAA) has received the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) FSTD approval certificate for its new CAE A330-200 full flight simulator (FFS).

The new CAE 7000 Series Airbus A330 FFS is GAA's fourth CAE simulator. It incorporates a CAE TroposTM-6000 200 degree field of view visual system, and represents a state-of-the-art simulation of the latest Airbus A330-200 aircraft.

The simulator will be used for initial and recurrent pilot training for Airbus A330 operators in the MENA region and beyond.

## Master boosted by export successes but stalled in UAE



Though it remains stalled in the UAE, and despite the loss of the prototype which crashed after departing the Dubai Air Show on November 18 2011, Italy's Alenia Aermacchi M-346 Master advanced jet trainer has had a double boost.

Delivery of the first aircraft for Singapore – the type's first export customer – has been backed up by an

important new export order from Israel.

Whether these latest successes for the aircraft will have any effect on the apparently stalled process in the UAE remains to be seen.

The UAE very nearly became the first export customer for the M-346 on February 25 2009, when it was announced that the type had won its long-running competition to find a new

advanced trainer aircraft. Officials at the IDEX 2009 defence show in Abu Dhabi described an impending order for 48 aircraft, with 20 trainers, 20 aircraft for light attack duties, and the remainder for a formation aerobatic display team. However, by January 2010, negotiations were reported to have stalled over specifications, and no progress has been reported since.

## Turkish cracks the tracking solution

Jeppesen, a unit of Boeing Flight Services, is now providing Turkish Airlines with its crew tracking solution to help the airline manage its crew operations as the airline continues to expand its air service.

## QEAF in new pilot programme

The Qatar Emiri Air Force (QEAF) has been working with Défense Conseil International (DCI) and Symbiotics Ltd, to implement a new aircrew

pre-selection solution that helps stream potential pilots (fixed and rotary wing) into the QEAF elite flying training programme, while improving efficiency of assessment and recruitment programmes.

## GATCO expands MRO to Jeddah

Bahrain's Gulf Aviation Technology Company (GATCO) has expanded its growing business with the addition of a line maintenance station at Jeddah's King Abdul-Aziz Airport in Saudi Arabia. The EASA-approved Part

145 company is now looking at doubling its presence across the region before the end of 2013.

## Quality boost for Gulf Technics

Bahrain MRO company Gulf Technics (GT) has been awarded the ISO 9001:2008 and AS/EN9120 certification following a detailed audit that covers all areas of operations.

The scope covers the supply of aircraft components and associated asset management for air transport operations

worldwide, including the coordination of aircraft component repair and overhaul management services.

## EgyptAir captures Air India contract

EgyptAir Training Center (ETC) has won a major contract from Air India to train pilots on the Boeing 777. The tender included both initial and recurrent training.

■ Kuwait Airlines has selected EgyptAir Training in Cairo to become its simulator provider for its entire fleet.

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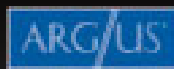
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# nexus



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## Emirates pushing for A380s and B777

Emirates president Tim Clark is putting pressure on Boeing to get on with the development of the next generation B777-X and at the same time said the airline could do with another 40 A380 superjumbos.

Speaking in Seattle, Clark said Emirates would be ordering a further 30 of the Airbus flagship models, taking the airline's total A380 fleet to 120 – but would opt for a further 10 if Dubai Airport had the capacity to accommodate them.

## RMAF to receive three Block 52 F-16s

The Royal Moroccan Air Force (RMAF) is set to receive three of the 24 Block 52 configuration F-16C/D aircraft, which will form a central part of its modern fleet of fighters.

The kingdom of Morocco purchased the aircraft in 2008. The sale included the aircraft, mission equipment, support equipment and a spares and technical support package.

## GECAS delivers third A320 to MEA

GE Capital Aviation Services Limited (GECAS), the commercial aircraft leasing and financing arm of GE, has announced the delivery of a third new Airbus A320 to Lebanon's Middle East Airlines.

The two previous aircraft were delivered in May and



## Iraq checks out Czech fighters

Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki headed an official delegation of Iraqi ministers to Aero Vodochody in the Czech Republic – a trip which resulted in Iraq ordering 28 of the L-159 light attack aircraft.

"We have a rich experience of cooperation in L-29 and L-39 programmes and we are here to create at least as successful future collaboration," said the president of Aero Vodochody, Ladislav Simek.

"We are fully committed to fulfil and even exceed all the requirements and expectations of the Republic of Iraq."

The L-159 Advanced Light Combat and Training Aircraft are designed to fulfil a variety of combat missions including air-to-ground, air-to-air and reconnaissance.

Currently, L-159 aircraft serve with the Czech Air Force, which uses them for Close Air Support, Advanced Training and Air Defence missions.

L-159s have been participating in numerous NATO exercises, mainly in the air-to-ground role.

AERO Vodochody is the largest aerospace manufacturer in the Czech Republic with its heritage stretching back to 1919.

June to expand the airline's fleet of 17 aircraft.

## Saudi is largest F110 non-US customer

The Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) has ordered 193 F110-GE-129E engines to power 84 new twin-engine Boeing F-15SA aircraft.

With the order the RSAF becomes the largest operator of F110 engines other than the US government.

This follows earlier RSAF orders for 156 engines to power 71 re-engined F-15S

aircraft.

The agreement calls for deliveries to start next year.

## CAE in \$55 million military deals

CAE has announced that it has won a series of military contracts valued at more than \$55 million.

They include a contract from Airbus Military to develop a C295 full-flight simulator for the Royal Air Force of Oman, a contract from BAE Systems to provide maintenance and support services for the

Indian Air Force's Hawk training devices, and contracts from the UK MoD to upgrade C-130J and Lynx simulators.

## New freighter delivered to MNG

Turkish freight operator MNG Airlines has taken delivery of the first of four A330-200Fs it has ordered from Airbus. The airline already operates a fleet of seven A300 cargo aircraft, and will expand its services by moving up to the A330 Freighter.

## Trade Bank of Iraq buys two aircraft

The Trade Bank of Iraq (TBI) has announced it is purchasing two Airbus passenger planes from Germany for \$86 million.

The bank's chairman, Hamdiya al-Jaff, said the planes would be available for airlines to charter or lease to enable them to increase capacity during the seasons of Hajj and other pilgrimages to Mecca.



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## Etihad Cargo's valuable service

Etihad Cargo has unveiled a new and highly secure valuable goods service called Safeguard.

The service has been designed to support the requirements of global security service companies, freight forwarders, companies and individuals who need to dispatch valuable goods such as precious metals and stones, jewellery, legal tender, and priceless works all over the world.

Safeguard is initially being rolled out in 23 certified cargo locations across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America.

## Mihin Lanka's Bahrain service

Sri Lanka's low-cost carrier, Mihin Lanka, has launched five-weekly services connecting Colombo and Bahrain.

Mihin Lanka's commercial flight service, using its Airbus fleet between Sri Lanka and Bahrain, is expected to bolster tourism and commercial ties between the two countries.

## Qatar opens new Saudi gateway

Qatar Airways has announced January 7 2013 as the launch date for scheduled flights to Gassim – its newest gateway in Saudi Arabia.

The airline is aiming to make Doha a key international hub for Saudis.

Gassim is Qatar Airways' fifth destination in the country.

It already serves Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam and Medina.

Initially Qatar will be operating four flights a week to the central Saudi city.



**Signing up:** Front, H.E. Saif Mohamed Al Hajeri, CEO of Tawazun Holding with Denel's Zoli Kunene. Back, Lt. General S.Z. Shoke, chief of the South African National Defence force and Lt. General Hamad Mohammed Thani Al Rumaithi, chief of staff of the UAE Armed Forces.

## Tawazun creates African partnership

The UAE Air Force will be the first to fly new precision-guided systems that will be manufactured in the UAE.

The manufacturing deal has come as a direct result of a partnership between Abu Dhabi's Tawazun Holding, the strategic investment firm focused on defence and specialised manufacturing, and the dynamics division of Denel, South Africa's largest defence manufacturer.

At the African Aerospace and Defence (AAD) show in Pretoria, the companies said

they were creating a joint venture to build the Middle East's first facility for the development, manufacture, assembly and integration of precision-guided systems for conventional air munitions.

The joint venture will be known as 'Tawazun Dynamics' and be owned 51% by Tawazun Holding and 49% by Denel. Tawazun Dynamics will supply precision-guided weapon systems as well as product system management services to the UAE force and to other international clients.

## Doha International delays opening

The New Doha International Airport will open for passenger traffic in the second half of 2013. The original scheduled opening date was December 12 2012, but this has been delayed due to the airport operator deciding to part company with a key contractor.

## Maroc partners with JetBlue

Morocco's flag carrier, Royal Air Maroc, and US airline JetBlue Airways have announced the launch of an interline agreement to connect each-other's networks and bring new flight options to travellers between North and Central Africa, and the Americas.

Through the arrangement travellers can book a single ticket combining flights on both carriers and enjoy one-stop baggage check-in when they transfer between the airlines at New York's John F Kennedy International Airport.

## GACA enters Saudi fuel cost row

The on-going controversy into fuel pricing in Saudi Arabia has led to the kingdom's civil aviation authority, GACA, to call on monopoly provider Saudi Aramco to cut its higher price for aviation fuel and create an atmosphere of fair competition for airlines.

The country is currently planning to deregulate its domestic services and has backed independent Saudi airline claims that aviation

fuel is cheaper in neighbouring countries.

## Gulf Air resumes flights to Iran/Iraq

Gulf Air has resumed its services to Iran and Iraq following the suspension of the services in 2011.

The Bahrain Government has approved flights to Baghdad, Erbil, Najaf and Basra in Iraq and Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz and Isfahan in Iran.

## New Euro customer centre for Qatar

Qatar Airways customers contacting the airline in key European markets will benefit from a new multi-lingual customer contact centre based in the Polish city of Wroclaw from early 2013.

## Turkey seizes Syrian cargo

Turkish F-16 jets forced down a Syrian Arab airliner en route from Moscow to Damascus in October after intelligence reports said it was carrying cargo banned by civil-aviation rules. Turkey confiscated the cargo among suggestions that weapons parts and military communications equipment had been discovered.

Aviation rules say Turkey must be given 10 days' notice about any arms shipments flying in its airspace.

## Turkish budget carrier's Dubai link

Turkish budget carrier Pegasus has expanded to the Gulf with flights from its Istanbul base to Dubai. Using its Sabehir Gokcen main base in the Asian side of Istanbul, Pegasus will also provide a low-cost hub route to many places in Europe via its 20-year-old network.

## Chapman Freeborn on the move

Chapman Freeborn's Dubai and Sharjah offices have joined forces and relocated to Dubai Airport Free Zone (DAFZA). The decision to move was taken to allow for continued expansion in order to meet the increasing demand for the global aircraft charter specialist's services in the region.

## Royal Jordanian and SriLankan deal

Royal Jordanian has finalised a new free-sale codeshare agreement with SriLankan Airlines.

## Air Arabia Basra link

Air Arabia has launched services to Basra, its third destination in Iraq.



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# THE ROO AWAKENING

*Industry analyst Saj Ahmad studies the latest jump in the kangaroo route between Europe and Australia with the Middle East as the feeding ground.*

For many years, both British Airways and Qantas have enjoyed joint success on the legendary ‘kangaroo route’ between the United Kingdom and Australia.

While the partnership, or joint service agreement between the two oneworld alliance partners has come to an end with Qantas’ new partner in Emirates, the competitive nature of the northern-to-southern hemisphere connections was not always that simple.

In many ways, that Qantas has now aligned itself with Emirates, a carrier that it berated and levelled all sorts of wild accusations at, seems to demonstrate to good effect just how strong the allure and pull of the GCC region has become. And with it, we’re seeing many airlines waking up to a dawn of new realities that they had hoped would either never manifest themselves, or were brushed off as wishful thinking.

Pending approval of the ten-year pact, Emirates and Qantas plan to operate a combined 98 flights a week between Dubai and Australia. When the deal was announced Qantas had no services to the GCC. By signing the deal Qantas has performed one of the biggest airline industry U-turns ever seen.

During the last decade as Emirates expedited deliveries of its ever-growing, and still expanding Boeing 777 fleet, Qantas, along with a great number of European and other airlines, was routinely launching savage, and unfounded, attacks on the UAE airline.

The most common of these was that the Government of Dubai was subsidising Emirates at all costs to keep up its aggressive campaign of global growth and to undermine the economics of other, independent airlines that did not enjoy the same

Continued  
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sort of financial and economic support.

Other charges, levelled by Qantas in particular, claimed Emirates did not pay for its fuel, or that if it did, the fuel was heavily discounted and/or subsidised to give the airline an added financial edge and alleviate the burden of fuel hedging. Another such accusation, which is probably as absurd as anything that has been bandied about between aviation giants, is that of Emirates getting free landing rights in Dubai.

For almost ten years Emirates, as well as other Arab airlines, has had to endure a litany of fingers pointing in its direction for alleged market distorting practices propping up the business, yet all the while, the very accusing parties never once provided a shred of cohesive evidence to substantiate their bizarre claims and instead failed to expand or compete in kind.

That Arabian airlines have utilised their respective Governments' money to good effect is something that should be commended. Hit the reverse button and you see that just three or four decades ago, a great many airlines in Asia, Europe and beyond all enjoyed the lavish monetary injections they got from their Governments with next to no increased value for customers, products, innovation or expansion.

Fast-forward to today, and Arab airlines are not squandering their investment. They're capitalising on the capital they've been afforded.

One look at Qantas and you see that its international operations have been losing money for quite a while, so it came as little surprise that it announced a dropping of its Singapore-Frankfurt service when it revealed its deal with Emirates.

### Low-cost subsidiary

Without its low-cost subsidiary Jetstar, Qantas would be dead. It is that insatiable appetite the world over that customers have for no frills, low-cost travel that has made Jetstar a popular consumer and travellers' choice when flying to Asia – often at significantly lower cost than competing fares offered by Qantas.

But further afield? While perceptions vary, the fact remains that many of the culinary, cabin and other awards almost always wing their way to the trophy cabinets of the Middle Eastern airlines. And to date, it is rather shocking that the very detractors of these GCC airlines have done nothing at all to improve their competitiveness.

The cruel reality for many of these critical airlines, which thought it easy to lambast Middle Eastern carriers, is that customers simply do not perceive the traditional kangaroo route as providing either meaningful value or any better connections across the globe. That is why Etihad has been quick to leverage its political connections via Abu Dhabi to get with Virgin Australia.

Virgin Australia over recent years has started to ebb away at Qantas's domestic dominance and now is a credible alternative to many trans-Tasman routes, as well as intra-Australian connections.

Etihad was quick to realise this intrinsic game



changer and that's why it increased its shareholding in Virgin Australia to 10%. In all likelihood, while Etihad maintains that it is not interested in running the airlines it has stakes in, it allows it to better support Virgin Australia's expansion.

Going forward, the landscape of Emirates/Qantas vs Etihad/Virgin Australia vs Qatar Airways looks as tasty as it does intriguing. Don't forget, there is significant player just out to the east of Australia that is overlooked in all this and it would not be surprising to see Qatar Airways make a play for some deal with Air New Zealand.

### Monumental power shift

There has been a monumental power shift to the Middle East hubs with unique one-stop services to literally anywhere on the planet.

Qantas and Australia have learnt the hard way that transit through congested hubs in Asia is no longer worth the hassle. Airports in the Middle East are being built and expanded with support from investors, Governments, airlines and people, all in concert. Contrast that to the delays seen in getting Heathrow's Terminal Five approved (let alone built) and the furore today over whether to expand it further or look at other options, such as the Thames estuary airport project to the east of the UK capital.

Virgin Australia, too, has realised that Etihad's on-going investment in new aircraft allows it to get a head start on the Emirates-Qantas tie-up. While the latter two carriers must wait until the second

quarter of next year to ratify their plans, Virgin Australia and Etihad are looking to boost services between Australia and the UAE and beyond.

Etihad takes deliveries of its 787-9s, for which it is the biggest customer to date, as well as A380s around mid-decade; which allows it not just the opportunity to open up long-range routes that were previously only serviceable with stop-offs, but also to cut fuel bills.

Even with the 777-300ERs that it is inducting, Etihad is, through its partnership with Virgin Australia, snaring market share and valuable high yield business traffic away from Qantas and Asia through its Abu Dhabi hub.

Through its ownership and partnership with Air Berlin, Etihad has even more options for customer connections to and through Europe. As well as organic growth, Etihad is securing inorganic.

So why did Emirates entertain Qantas?

Well, there are a number of reasons but, in short, Emirates has effectively pounced on its prey in the same way a lioness does to feed her cubs. Qantas, for all its past glory, is a spent force. Without Jetstar propping it up, the airline would have gone to the wall. It has damaged its future by squandering the coveted slots for the 787-9 by cancelling orders for 35 of them, when it could just have easily deferred deliveries. Those slots have already been taken up by customers.

So while Qantas lumbers around with gas-guzzling A330s, it will have to wait until 2016 before it can realistically get its hands on a 787-9, assuming of course that it hasn't ditched its



## The growth of connections

Between the three big Gulf airlines – Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad – there are an ever-growing number of flights to Australia from the hubs in Dubai, Doha and Abu Dhabi.

Emirates has 70 flights a week across four Australian cities, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

Qatar Airways flies ten times a week to the country with daily services to Melbourne and three weekly flights to Perth.

Etihad has 21 flights a week from Abu Dhabi to Brisbane (via Singapore), Melbourne and Sydney.

As of November 1, Emirates planned to add to its tally with new services to Adelaide with four new weekly services – and from February 1 2013, a daily flight.

Emirates is also upping its weekly services to Perth from the current 14 to 19 flights from December. That service will go triple-daily in March, giving Emirates a whopping 84 flights per week Down Under.

Qatar Airways is also growing its Australian presence. In December it will increase frequencies to Perth to daily flights, giving it 14 flights per week, while the airline is looking to 2013 as a possible springboard for more cities to service. On the cards are Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide.

Etihad will be increasing its flights to Brisbane to a daily service in February, giving it 25 flights per week to Australia. With its partner, Virgin Australia, the two airlines offer an additional three flights per week on the Sydney-Abu Dhabi route for a total of 28 flights per week.

remaining purchase rights!

Emirates, with orders for 777-300ERs, A380s and A350s, is already geared up for the future. By giving Qantas a home in Dubai International Airport's Terminal Three it should not be seen as some joining of equals. Emirates' decision is one of mercy on a poor participant.

Qantas may well enjoy the new kangaroo route through the GCC but the one aspect it cannot defend against is the very likely probability of its high yield and/or leisure traffic filtering off on to Emirates-liveried aircraft in Dubai for onward travel.

Qantas is retiring its ageing 747-400 fleet; its A330s are not fuel efficient against the likes of the 787 family or 777 family, and Emirates has hedged its future growth by making sure it has the aircraft inventory in place to cope with demand.

Throw into the mix the spectre and equally frenetic growth of low-cost airlines in the GCC, thanks to innovators like Air Arabia and the relentless growth shown by a young flydubai, and Qantas will have it all to do. There is simply no way that Emirates will allow its planned partner to siphon off traffic for its own ends.

And where does that leave the likes of Qatar Airways, British Airways and Jetstar? Qatar Airways has not shown any enthusiasm at all for entertaining British Airways. And rightly so.

British Airways is mired in its own angst due to a struggling Iberia. The much-vaunted synergies that the British Airways-Iberia merger was supposed to have brought are taking far too long to realise. British Airways, perhaps, should

instead look to focus with Emirates and Qantas in Dubai.

For Jetstar, the sad reality is that Qantas's termination of the 787-9s means that its plans for services to Europe will be dropped. Forever.

Jetstar will remain a low-cost player in the domestic, regional and Asian market, but will be exposed more heavily to the aggressive growth that will accompany the expansion of rivals like Scoot and the two planned long-haul start-ups that Lion Air wants to set up by mid decade – ironically using 787s that may well have been vacated thanks to Qantas's order cancellation.

Like Qantas, Jetstar cannot rely on the A330 forever.

While the orders it has for Airbus A320neos will address the regional and domestic replacement of its existing A320 fleet, the 787 is a much-needed aircraft for it to realise its true potential.

### Low-cost option

Of course, there is a great case for Jetstar to deploy the 787 to Dubai if conditions allow the Qantas-Emirates partnership to let in a long-haul, low-cost option. But the priority will always be given to Emirates' smaller sibling in flydubai. While flydubai has not expressed a preference for any low-cost long-haul flights, that it is already operating its 737-800s on sectors over five hours means that it may well examine the possibility of augmenting Emirates expansion with a hybrid low-cost option that may well halt a Jetstar 787 ever landing in Dubai.

One thing is for certain though. With Qatar Airways and Etihad ready to up the ante, thanks to their own growing fleets, Emirates and Qantas will not have it all their own way.

Qantas's domestic footprint assures it nothing.

Virgin Australia and Etihad have already shown that their partnership is ready, willing and able to throw resources behind their expansion. Qatar Airways, too, with its planned move to its new home at New Doha International Airport, coupled with the imminent arrival of its 787-8s, will give it the legs to expand to those Australian cities that it does not yet serve.

Qantas can ill afford to see its backyard overrun with rivals while it eyes another prize in Dubai.

Consumers of course, will be absolutely spoiled for choice.

The prospect of what we can see in terms of connectivity from Australia into Europe, via the Middle East has started to heat up. There will be pressure on fringe players like Gulf Air, Royal Jordanian Airlines, Saudia, Egyptair, Kuwait Airways and also Iraqi Airways.

When you look at what is on offer between the Arabian 'Big Three' today, you can only surmise that their desire to pull in more traffic to their hubs is going to be a foregone conclusion.

But with so much at stake, no definitive assurance that the Emirates-Qantas tie-up will get the necessary approval at the first time of asking and without any changes remains to be seen.

What is clear, however, is that the kangaroo route has changed direction – possibly for good.

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**Jill Stockbridge** looks at Embraer and its plan to prove this to the region's airlines.



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Following its success with single-aisle jets in Europe and the United States, Brazilian aircraft manufacturer Embraer is eyeing the Middle East as the next big market for the E-Jet series E170, E175, E190 and E195.

The E-Jets are not new, having been in production for seven to eight years, but the company believes they are the perfect answer for regional travel and that the market is ripe to receive them.

Currently the company boasts 63 E-Jets within nine operators in six Middle Eastern countries. And for the sixth consecutive year, the E-Jet family is the second most-operated aircraft fleet in the Middle East, servicing 90 markets from eight major hubs in the region. The team boasts that an E-Jet is taking off once every six minutes in the Middle East.

Mathieu Duquesnoy, vice president, airline marketing Middle East and Africa, is proud of the company's achievements. "This is tremendous considering the first E-Jet in the region only entered service with Saudi Arabian Airlines in 2005. While the A320 is still the firm favourite in the region, we have seen E-Jets go from 0 to 18% of the market share in seven years."

Duquesnoy has found that the concept of 'less is more' has been a harder sell in the region than in Europe, as the major airlines show a preference for wide-bodied aircraft, even on shorter sectors. "There was no need to sell the concept in Europe but here, where sometimes money is no object, there

Continued  
on Page 26

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

is the feeling that bigger is better and we have to explain the advantages of the smaller aircraft.

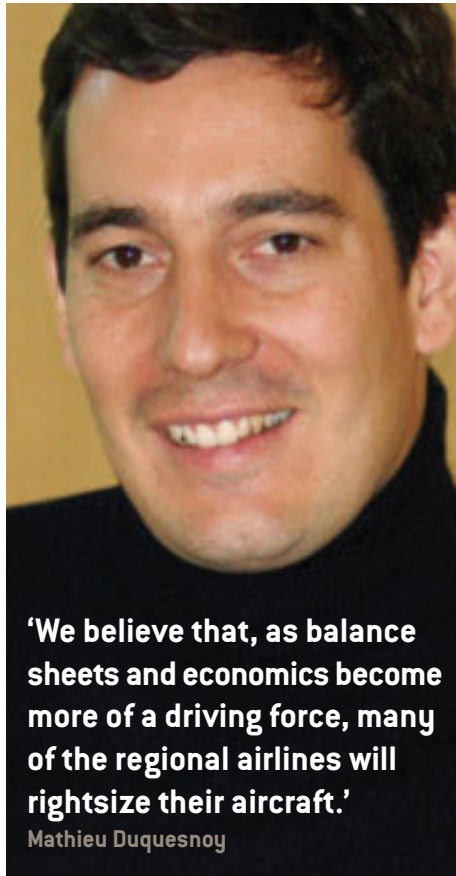
“However, the market dynamics are ripe for rightsizing. We believe that, as balance sheets and economics become more of a driving force, many of the regional airlines will rightsize their aircraft. The market is open to this and we have the right product. Our aircraft have been praised as the most comfortable and they are well accepted,” he said.

They are certainly making an impact in the region. Following Saudi Arabian’s lead, Royal Jordanian bought E175s and E195s and was the first to fly them internationally, from Amman to Muscat. Egyptair Express now runs 12 E170s, nasair has 15 E190 and E195s with Gulf Air purchasing two 170s and two 190s, and Oman Air joining the customer base with two E-175s operational and two on backlog.

**Political instability**

Duquesnoy believes that the downturn and the political instability in the region have helped to demonstrate the flexibility of having the smaller aircraft in a fleet. While airlines with single aircraft or just wide-body fleets could only reduce capacity by reducing frequencies, E-Jet operators were able to use the smaller aircraft to match capacity to demand.

Royal Jordanian, for example, reduced capacity to Cairo, Damascus and Tunis during the earlier unrest, without dropping a single frequency, by replacing the A320 aircraft with E-Jets on the affected routes.



**‘We believe that, as balance sheets and economics become more of a driving force, many of the regional airlines will rightsize their aircraft.’**

Mathieu Duquesnoy

Gulf Air had also purchased four E-Jets as part of a strategy to increase frequencies on key regional routes, but the political unrest in Bahrain caused it to redeploy the smaller aircraft to reduce capacity by 25% on both the Abu Dhabi and Muscat routes, without reducing frequency.

Embraer forecasts strong growth in the region, benefitting from a regional air transport boom and the creation of mega hubs fed by regional carriers. “We project the need for 2,135 new aircraft by 2031,” said Duquesnoy. “Approximately 935 of these will be wide-bodied jets, around 840 narrow-bodied and around 55 turbo props, but we expect 15% of that demand to be for smaller jets, with between 30-120 seats. That is around 305 aircraft required over the next 20 years and as the strong leaders of the sector, with 75% market share, we expect to be supplying that need.”

Despite Duquesnoy’s optimism, there may be stumbling blocks to the much-flouted rightsizing that have nothing to do with cultural attitudes to wide-bodied jets. A representative of flydubai commented that the airline could not reduce the size of its aircraft, as it was unable to secure the additional slots to make up the seat numbers by higher frequencies.

**Liberalisation of regional markets**

Duquesnoy admits that liberalisation of regional markets would help. “There is a lot of regulation in place, particularly in Saudi and India, and the airlines are not able to fly as they want to. A little deregulation would help the sector to boom. However, we see the future of the E-Jets as being in the MENA regional and have invested in the region to develop that potential.”

To support this growth the company has boosted its presence in the region with an E-Jets authorised service centre in Cairo, full flight simulators in Bahrain, Jeddah and Amman, an increased sales, marketing and technical staff in Dubai, and a recently opened spare part distribution centre in Dubai, in partnership with Swiss-headquartered Kuehne and Nagel, the global logistics giant.

The new centre, based in Dubai Logistics City, a stone’s throw from the new Al Maktoum International Airport, Dubai World Central, has a 16,000sqm footprint with a dedicated area for Embraer’s needs and has guaranteed to make available parts for an aircraft on the ground (AOG) for pick up within 12 hours.

Embraer also held Asia and Middle East operators’ conferences in Bangalore, India, and Abu Dhabi in October, with the Middle East conference focusing on the ultra-large Lineage 1,000, the large Legacy 650 and super midsize Legacy 600.

The conferences covered the latest technical, maintenance and flight operations, while giving customers the chance to give feedback to the company through workshops and panel sessions.

Duquesnoy concluded: “Our investment in the region clearly demonstrates our commitment to the Middle East and will enhance the support already available.”

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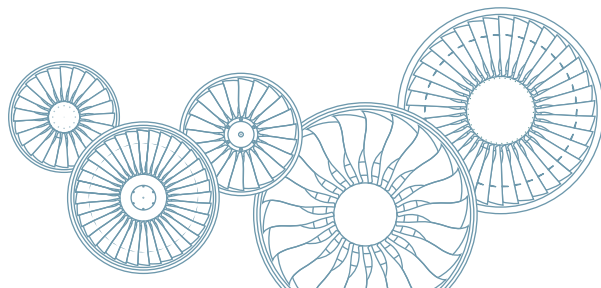


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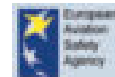


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# Kuwaiting time...

*Is time running out for Kuwait Airways' aspirations to be among the Gulf's big boys? **Martin Rivers** finds out.*

**K**uwait's decision to suspend the privatisation process for its national carrier came as little surprise last year, with muted interest among bidders and more pressing concerns in the emirate's fractured parliamentary system.

But the subsequent grounding of three Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) aircraft in July – following an emergency landing by one of its Airbus A300s in Medina – underscores how time could be running out for the airline's ageing fleet.

Kuwait's most recent attempt to resurrect the privatisation bill came unstuck in June, when draft legislation provisionally approved by the cabinet was swept aside with the rest of parliament.

The Constitutional Court's move to invalidate February's election – which had seen significant gains by opposition Islamist parties – forces the emirate to once again go through the motions for new legislation.

"[The interim] parliament will be dismissed but we don't yet know when exactly," airline PR director Adel Boresly said, in reference to the pro-government ministers drafted in following the dissolution.

"There are some important decrees with the government that will be issued in between parliaments," he explained. "The Emir will decide on these issues during that period of time. The parties will have two months' election time for

campaigning, and during that period the important decrees to run the government issues will be announced."

While the parliamentary machine prepares to reboot, KAC's long-awaited and sorely-needed fleet renewal has once again been kicked into the long grass.

Boresly said the flag carrier drafted two 'operational plans' for short-term fleet renewal in the wake of the Medina incident, advocating the leasing of either five or 10 new jets. Direct aircraft orders will only be placed after privatisation has come to fruition – a distant prospect that entails selling a 35% stake to new strategic investors, and pushing through controversial staff restructuring.

#### Long-running row

But privatisation and fleet renewal are not the only aviation issues winding their way slowly through Kuwait's dysfunctional parliament. The airline's long-running row with Iraqi Airways – which it accuses of stealing 10 civilian jets during the Second Gulf War – is also back on the agenda.

Reports from Baghdad in March indicated that Iraq had agreed to pay \$500 million in compensation to Kuwait to end the bitter dispute. That marked a significant discount to the \$1.2 billion in damages awarded by Britain's High Court, but sources say the payments have failed to materialise.

Questions persist not just over whether the two parliaments stand by the deal, but more fundamentally over "whether this was even a real settlement to start with", one person close to the matter said.

The rancorous dispute dates back to August 1990, when Iraqi troops swept through Kuwait and seized 10 KAC jets parked at Kuwait International Airport, purportedly acting under orders from Saddam Hussein. After being flown to Basra for "safe keeping", four of the aircraft were destroyed in coalition bombing and six were moved to Iran. Millions of dollars worth of spare parts were also allegedly stolen.

Though the surviving aircraft were eventually repatriated to Kuwait, subsequent legal action unearthed evidence that Iraqi Airways had not merely followed Saddam's instructions – as it claimed, initially successfully, in the English courts – but rather airline management had forged documents in an effort to mask their complicity.

Several years of asset seizure by Kuwait followed, culminating in the detention by British police of Iraqi Airways director general Kifah Hassan Jabbar after the airline's first flight to London for two decades touched down in April 2010.

Amid deteriorating relations, an apparent breakthrough came in March of this year when a

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KAC's fleet is ageing but legal delays and investment starvation is affecting the airline's market prospects.

#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

spokesperson for Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki announced that the two countries had brokered a settlement. The deal would see Iraq pay \$300 million up-front in cash, the spokesman said, while providing another \$200 million towards an unspecified joint venture – believed to be a pilgrimage charter service to Najaf.

However, cracks emerged in the deal over the summer, with KAC lawyer Christopher Gooding, who has represented the airline for the duration of the dispute, warning that the Iraqi government appeared to be backtracking.

“No payment has been made pursuant to the proposed ‘broad terms’ agreement,” he said in July. “The terms of the proposed settlement are not as set out by Iraq. The terms, which are far from clear, appear to provide for a payment of \$300 million, plus the right to receive the first \$200 million profits from an unspecified joint venture, in which Kuwait is expected to invest an unspecified amount.”

In other words, the Iraqis were insisting that the second tranche of compensation was contingent on the joint venture attaining profitability – a long, uncertain and costly endeavour for any start-up airline – without financial support from Baghdad.

A second agreement reached between the parties in late July reiterated that the Iraqi government is liable for both tranches in full but, to date, Baghdad has only voted on the initial \$300 million payment. Moreover, the dissolution of Kuwait’s parliament has muddied the waters further by delaying the ability of its National Assembly to formally approve the second deal.

In October the general secretary of the Iraqi Cabinet, Ali al-Allaq said Iraq will not pay compensation to Kuwait Airways for the debt dispute before Kuwait drops legal claims against Iraqi Airways. Under an agreement reached in March, the two countries decided that Kuwait would abandon all lawsuits against Iraqi Airways in return for Iraq paying \$500 million, but in an interview with Bloomberg al-Allaq said Kuwait has yet to drop the claims in court.

KAC’s Boresly declined to comment on the court case, insisting that it was “government to government, not airline to airline”. However, the source that spoke to Arabian Aerospace confirmed that the terms of the settlement had been murky from the get-go. He suggested that the ambiguous wording of the first agreement could have been interpreted as promising just one-fifth of the headline figure.

“What was originally agreed was always going to be a difficult pill for people to swallow,” he said. “On an apparent settlement of \$500 million you actually got \$100 million. Not a good deal, was the general view.”

With the courts struggling to hold together the agreement, KAC’s legal team has dropped hints that asset seizure could resume shortly. Previous enforcement action saw Kuwait take ownership of Iraqi Airways’ offices in Jordan, as well as disrupting delivery of its Bombardier CRJ-900s from Canada. But while Iraqi Airways faces an uncertain future, KAC is hardly in a position of strength.

#### Slump in bookings

Kuwait’s flag carrier saw a slump in bookings in the aftermath of the A300 Medina incident, Boresly confirmed, though he stressed that the decision to ground three aircraft coupled with renewed fleet planning has restored confidence.

“The minister [Salem Al-Othainah] was convinced by our engineering experts that because of the age of the aircraft we need extra time for maintenance work on the ground. So he said, ‘Ok ground the three, complete the maintenance work, and [source] spare parts’. We have to request some spare parts from outside, and that takes time.”

KAC’s fleet consists of 17 aircraft with an average age of 18 years, comprising five A300s, three A310s, three A320s, four A340s and two Boeing 777s. One of each of the A300s, A310s and A320s has been grounded and will stay in hangars for “at least between six and nine months”.

Recalling the furore surrounding the Medina scare, Boresly said: “There was a drop [in bookings] for a couple of weeks but we called a media conference, we explained to them what happened, and then the bookings started to pick up after that. By the time of the Eid holidays most of our aircraft were full again.”

KAC is mitigating the fleet reduction by cutting frequencies on routes already encountering lower traffic numbers. Cairo, Beirut and some destinations in the Indian subcontinent were among the first to be scaled back.

The airline is also taking advantage of the Kuwaiti Emir’s private 747-400. Though the aircraft has a VIP configuration it still seats around 300 passengers, allowing KAC to temporarily boost capacity on reduced routes as well as accommodating spikes in demand for religious traffic. “At the beginning of Ramadan we leased it,” Boresly noted. “If it is on the ground and they don’t need it, they lease it to us.”

Moving forward, management have a good understanding of the fleet requirements, but they remain hamstrung by the difficult political climate.

The airline has submitted two ‘operational plans’ to the government outlining possible short-term fleet renewal, with the upcoming Emiri decrees expected to call for new leases irrespective of how far privatisation has progressed. “The government will decide whether it will be five or 10 aircraft. If it were five, they would be for certain destinations only. But if it is 10, we can expand [the existing route network].”

The leased jets will include either A320 or 737 narrow-bodies and A330 or 777 wide-bodies. Any talk of direct purchases is strictly off-limits for now, Boresly said, adding: “That is for the strategic partner who’s going to buy the company to decide. They will decide whether to buy or not, and what kind of aircraft.”

With several lessors already having submitted proposals, KAC is keen to sign agreements and begin phasing out its older aircraft. But uncertainty persists over parliament’s willingness, or ability, to push through the privatisation



necessary for a comprehensive overhaul of the carrier.

Privatisation efforts date back to 2008, when ministers drew up the legal framework for restructuring the airline and transferring ownership from the public sector.

Having been almost consistently lossmaking for the previous two decades, in 2011 KAC began the first phase of its "holistic transformation" into a private entity. Share capital of KD220 million (\$785 million) was predetermined for the company, with 35% due to be auctioned off to strategic investors.

Another 20% would be retained by sovereign wealth fund the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), while 40% would be distributed among Kuwaiti citizens through an initial public offering (IPO) and the remaining 5% allocated to airline employees.

Joint-stock companies listed on the Kuwaiti Stock Exchange as well as "specialised global companies" were eligible to bid for the 35% stake. But by October of last year the plan had been suspended amid reports of underwhelming interest.

"The delay in privatising KAC gives us the opportunity to address a number of operational and structural issues ahead of a future

privatisation programme," the airline said at the time.

Hopes were resurrected in April when state-run news agency KUNA reported that the cabinet had approved draft legislation paving the way for privatisation in the more realistic timeframe of three years. Though details were sketchy, it was clear that the government planned to force through immediate restructuring while allowing extra time for a strategic investor to be found.

**Price estimates**

The KUNA report made no mention of price estimates, relieving those who had warned that the earlier KD220 million valuation – originally proposed by investment banking firm Rothschild in June 2009 – was excessively optimistic.

But this effort, too, was scuppered in June, when Kuwait's parliament was dissolved and the National Assembly denied the chance to vote on the matter. With restructuring plans back in the hands of the government and KIA, there is little KAC can do to speed up progress.

"We are in a transition period," Boresly explained. "We are waiting for the government to establish Kuwait Airways Company [as a part-privatised entity], and then we will start

implementing all steps – reducing staff through retirement, leasing aircraft, restructuring the whole operation. The plan is there, but we are waiting for the resolution from the government to establish the company."

As soon as leases are secured, KAC will benefit from immediate savings on fuel burn as well as reduced maintenance costs. Cutting staff expenditure poses a bigger challenge, with Kuwaitis long accustomed to a cradle-to-grave benefits system that encompasses well-paying public sector jobs.

Indeed, hostility towards restructuring at the flag carrier boiled over in March, when dozens of flights were cancelled after employees staged industrial action in pursuit of still higher wages.

Ultimately, though, the 58-year-old airline has no choice but to push through its transformation into a commercially viable private entity. Newcomer Jazeera Airways, which was founded in 2005 under the emirate's aviation liberalisation scheme, posted its eighth consecutive quarterly profit this summer – compared to KAC's reported full-year loss of KD80 million.

Losses at the flag carrier now exceed \$3 billion over two decades. Even Kuwait's fractured parliament must surely have run out of patience with the status quo.

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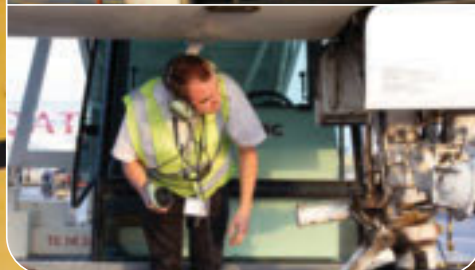
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# Gulf Aviation Technology to Open its New Line Station in Jeddah



**GATCO**, one of the leading and the fastest-growing aircraft maintenance companies, has announced the official opening of its Line maintenance station in Jeddah King Abdul-Aziz Airport as part of its endeavor to bring its services experience to the region. The opening of the latest line maintenance station marks a further expansion of the company's regional network of line maintenance stations, which now covers 2 airports in the GCC region Bahrain and Jeddah, with plans to expand this network to a total of 4 locations by 2013.

**GATCO**, provides technical services for different capabilities such as Airbus A320, Embraer 170/190 as well as for Boeing 737NG/747/757/767/777 and Airbus A300/A310/A330/A340/A380. The company offers its customers comprehensive and tailor-made solutions for a complete handling support experience. **GATCO** holds the EASA Part 145 certificates required to provide integrated narrow and wide body aircraft maintenance.

'With the growing demand for narrow and wide body aircraft technical maintenance services in the rapidly developing GCC market, it is crucial that we remain in close proximity to our clients. We are confident that our highly competitive world-class aviation technical support and maintenance services mainly contribute to the success of the global aviation industry' **says the CEO of GATCO, Hakim Al-Allawy.**

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# PRIVATE'S PROGRESS



*The saga of the Saudi Arabian Airlines group privatisation could soon have a happy ending, as **Martin Rivers** discovers.*

**W**hen Saudi Arabia's Supreme Economic Council approved the plan to privatise flag carrier Saudia in 2006, no-one was expecting an overnight transformation of the 61-year-old flag carrier.

It had already taken six years to bring the roadmap before government, with His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz having inaugurated the first privatisation studies in 2000.

The actual process of dividing Saudia into six private businesses – catering, cargo, ground handling, maintenance, training and the core airline unit – was destined to take many more years.

But, notwithstanding several missed deadlines, steady progress has been made by the carrier. Its cargo, catering and ground

handling units have all been part-privatised; while the maintenance and training units are due to join their ranks by the second quarter of 2013.

Privatisation comes against a backdrop of rapid change in the kingdom's skies, with renewed investment in airport infrastructure, liberalisation of the domestic market and the establishment of an independent civil aviation authority all shaking up the aviation sector.

Indeed, handing Saudia over to the private sector is just one facet of the broader goal of boosting competition in the kingdom, explained Shakeel Adam, managing director of Aviado Partners Consulting and one of the early architects of the airline's overall restructuring approach.

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The ground handling business is close to an IPO launch.

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“The royal family has been systematically commercialising major activity in the country for years,” he said. “The aim appears to be to turn large state enterprises into self-sufficient, efficient commercial organisations, in effect reducing the financial burden on the government.

“The advantage to privatising is that it can act as a catalyst for restructuring the business itself. Through the process of privatisation the state creates the opportunity not only to restructure the balance sheet, but also to actually reorganise and reshape the business.

“It’s about strengthening the commercial viability of the business by using the transformation process to boost efficiency.”

To this end Saudi Arabian Airlines Catering (SAAC) became the first unit to undergo privatisation in 2007, with 49% being sold to Strategic Catering Company (SCC), a consortium led by Abdulmohsen Alhokair Group.

The catering unit moved further into the private sector over the summer of 2012, when 24.6 million shares – representing 30% of the company – were released in an initial public offering (IPO).

About 12.3% of the stake came from Saudia itself, while 14.7% was contributed by SCC and a further 3% by minority shareholders. That left just

a little over one-third of SAAC under public sector control.

Shawgi Mushtag, executive vice president of privatisation at Saudia and former vice president of the catering unit, said the flotation had been “very successful based on financial and operational results”.

At the time of writing, shares in the business were up almost 15% since the offering, which was itself 221% oversubscribed.

**Strategic unit**

The second strategic unit to undergo privatisation was the airline’s massive freight operation, Saudi Airlines Cargo, which was turned into a limited liability company during a 30% divestment to Tarabut Air Freight Services in 2008.

In a sign that specialisation has had a positive impact on the company, Saudi Airlines Cargo posted a 26% year-on-year increase in cargo tonnage during the first half of 2012. That came despite industry body IATA warning that the modest recovery in freight markets – evident since late 2011 – had “stagnated” over the first seven months of 2012, with global freight traffic declining 2.4%.

The cargo specialist now serves a global network of 225 destinations, including newly introduced

routes to Frankfurt, Vienna, Ho Chi Min City and Dubai.

Peter Scholten, vice president of commercial operations at Saudi Airlines Cargo, said the ultimate aim of privatisation was “to improve the service levels of the cargo activities and to grow activity in the market”.

Though he emphasised that there are currently no plans to hold an IPO for the cargo unit, Saudia’s ground handling unit is itself on the cusp of a stock market launch.

Saudi Ground Services (SGS) was established in 2010 under the third wave of privatisation to date. It was created by the merger of forbearer Saudi Arabian Airline Ground Services with two other companies – National Handling Services and Attar Ground Handling.

Mushtag confirmed that SGS is close to launching an IPO “very soon”, though he declined to provide details about the timeline or pricing, noting that the financial advisors have yet to start work on the process. Earlier media reports had claimed that HSBC was being enlisted to oversee the IPO.

Aviado’s Adam explained that stock market flotation is not always the favoured course of action when privatising a large, multi-faceted company that

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# SGS

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#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

commands a captive audience. Instead, a small pool of strategic investors with relevant expertise and close-knit interests will often be the preferred option.

“It really depends on the relationship between the different units,” he said. “How will they be carved up? Which businesses are going to be fully separated, and are they really going to be arms-length from each other or not?”

Citing efforts elsewhere in the industry to privatise frequent flier programmes, Adam suggested that total autonomy among all airline units is not always advisable. “Once they separate and start becoming completely independent businesses running completely separately, they have different incentives, different performance metrics, and different reasons for existence,” he cautioned.

However, when it comes to the strategy of part-privatising individual units in a staggered manner – as Saudia has done – he said there are clear benefits.

Not only can the company “test the market” and evaluate investors’ appetites before releasing more shares, but it can also re-invest minor

capital injections in order to improve the business and ultimately achieve a higher valuation for the majority holding.

With catering, cargo and ground handling already privatised, all eyes inevitably fall on the remaining three strategic units – maintenance, training and the passenger airline.

#### Maintenance division

The Jeddah-based maintenance division, which employs more than 5,000 staff, was rebranded Saudia Aerospace Engineering Industries (SAEI) ahead of a tender for 30% of the company’s capital originally advertised in 2011. Mushtag declined to comment on how far the divestment has progressed, though he said privatisation of the unit should be completed by the second quarter of 2013.

An identical timeframe was given for the privatisation of the Prince Sultan Aviation Academy (PSAA), Saudia’s training unit, while the jewel in the crown – the core airline unit – is still awaiting government approval.

Leaving the passenger airline until last is standard practice, Adam explained, as privatisation in essence involves “separating out

all of the pieces so you’ve got less baggage to deal with at the end”. A slimmed-down, operationally-focused airline would likely then undergo an IPO, he conjectured.

Questions remain over the form Saudia will take when privatisation comes full circle. Proposals had been drawn up to split the airline into smaller divisions – a full-service carrier, a VIP carrier, a charter unit and a religious carrier for Hajj and Umrah traffic – but no decision has been announced. For the time being, integration into the SkyTeam alliance will rightly take precedence.

What is clear, however, is that the kingdom’s aviation sector is undergoing seismic changes, propelled by liberalisation of the duopolistic domestic market and massive infrastructure investments. Having lost ground to regional competitors, Saudia must embrace this new era by “changing the mind-set of the entire organisation”, Mushtag concluded.

Though not a miracle cure for the challenges facing the airline, privatisation is undoubtedly a step – or, more accurately, a series of small steps – in the right direction.



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*As Saudi Arabia's aviation regulator reveals which new carriers are being granted licences to operate flights in the kingdom, **Alan Dron** looks at the problems the new entrants will have to overcome.*

Nas Air - now code sharing with Etihad - is already growing its domestic activities.



# Will Saudi openings keep the door closed?

**W**ith the largest population of any country in the Arabian Gulf and an expanding middle class that wants to fly, Saudi Arabia should be prime territory for any airline. But long-standing restrictions on the amount airlines can charge for domestic flights, together with substantial fuel subsidies for Saudia, have hobbled carriers seeking to challenge the state-owned flag-carrier.

Most notably, low-cost carrier Sama closed its doors in August 2010 after just three years, with CEO Bruce Ashby commenting that it had been awaiting "a significant aviation relief package with respect to fuel subsidies, subsidies for PSO routes [and] a gradual lifting of domestic fare caps". That package had failed to arrive in time, he lamented.

The regulatory situation had remained unchanged since then, with surviving budget carrier Nas Air having to cope with fare caps on domestic routes and Saudia's fuel subsidy.

Now, the Saudi authorities plan to allow one or two new operators into the market. Qatar Airways has acknowledged it is interested, while Gulf Air is supporting a bid from Saudi trading company Abdel Hadi Abdullah Al-Qahtani & Sons.

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**Nas Air CEO Francois Bouteiller calls for a level playing field.**  
**Right: The changes come too late for domestic victim Sama.**



Also in the running are Bahrain Air in alliance with the Saudi Private Aviation company (SPA); HNA Airlines, a Chinese airline with more than 129 aircraft in alliance with the Saudi Mazaya youth company; The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in alliance with the Egyptian International Aviation, a company which already operates regular flights from Egypt to a number of the kingdom's airports; Saudi-owned Nesma Holding that owns Nesma Airlines, which operates regular flights from Egypt to Saudi Arabia; and finally, Falcon Express Cargo.

Saudi's civil aviation authority GACA said there could be more than one licence granted. The winning contenders were due to be announced around the time *Arabian Aerospace* was going to press.

Saj Ahmad, airline analyst with London-based FBE Aerospace, believes there are certainly opportunities for new entrants to the Saudi market and they will probably pull customers away from Saudia and Nas Air, particularly if those customers are from the professional classes that have previously experienced airlines like Qatar Airways, Emirates Airline and Etihad.

If the Saudi government allows a third party to enter the domestic market, it must ensure there is a level playing field, as the two current incumbents would undoubtedly come under pressure, he believes.

A level playing field, says Nas Air CEO François Bouteiller, is all he wants.

## Why competition is good for Saudi Arabia

**The idea of issuing new licences to foreign as well as local airlines in Saudi Arabia "was done mainly to broaden the horizons of the travelling public and give them more options when it comes to many of the local routes", said a spokesman for the country's aviation regulator, the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA).**

**"We believe the competition will help improve the quality and the quantity of the services provided. With the unprecedented increase in air traffic inside the kingdom, there was an obvious need to introduce new players into the game. Fourteen companies applied for the licenses, seven of which qualified for further vetting and these seven companies were invited to submit their proposals.**

**"Once the decision is made, the winning companies will be given a choice to pick the hub airport which they want to operate from and the possibility of adding international routes to their destinations. The final decision will be handed in the coming few months."**

Bouteiller made the point that GACA's move is not deregulation, as some have described it, but the more modest introduction of one or two new players into the kingdom's aviation scene. Deregulation "would be more interesting", but too many aspects of Saudi Arabia's airport infrastructure could not cope with the strains that would create.

"We wouldn't necessarily want complete deregulation. The country is not ready," he said. An airport such as Taif, for example, although classed as an international facility, struggled to handle more than three flights at a time. Nas Air was keen to open up a network based on secondary airports but conditions had to improve.

Part of the problem was that too many aspects of airport infrastructure – ground handling, catering and particularly fuel supply – were monopolies. "These [factors] need to change."

Fuel has been a particular bugbear. Nas Air does not receive subsidised supplies: "The price of fuel for me is more expensive here than in Europe because of the monopoly of Aramco," said Bouteiller.

Nas Air began existence as a largely domestic carrier, but had found itself forced by economic necessity to expand externally, so that fewer of its routes were subject to fare caps. "In 2009 it was obvious there was absolutely no way we could make money," he said. Over the following year, there was a wholesale shift in Nas Air's route network to mainly foreign sectors.



“I don’t think I could survive if I didn’t have international routes,” said Bouteiller. Even in peak times, with 100% load factors, he was making “just a very little money” from domestic services.

This may be about to change. In September GACA appealed for fuel costs to be reduced to players in the domestic market. According to the newspaper *Al-Eqtisadiyah* GACA vice-president Faisal Al-Sugair called on monopoly provider Saudi Aramco to cut its price and create fair competition for airlines.

#### Less potential

“Aramco is charging airline companies prices higher than international prices, even in neighbouring countries with lesser potential. For instance, Sudan is supplying fuel to all airline companies at a lower price than Aramco,” Al-Sugair was quoted as saying.

According to the newspaper, Al-Sugair added the higher fuel prices led to airlines avoiding refuelling at Saudi airports. “It is unreasonable that the world’s top oil producer demands a higher price than other countries with lesser oil resources,” he was reported as saying.

Nas Air has previously said it can refuel in India cheaper than in its own country.

The other main problem facing carriers wanting to tap into the growing demand for domestic air travel is the fare cap imposed 17 years ago. Designed initially to encourage air travel within the kingdom, it has become a

seriously limiting factor on carriers, as it has not kept pace with inflation. “It costs SR150 – around \$40 – for a flight of 70 minutes,” said Bouteiller. “How can you do that? It’s impossible under the existing fare cap to make money.”

Saudi Arabia was a country full of opportunity, he said, but it was a complex place in which to do business and new processes would be needed to support a fully open market.

How to solve the fare cap problem? “It’s a very sensitive topic,” admitted Bouteiller, who said there was a lot of pressure on the government but, so far, no sign of a change in policy. “My approach is: ‘Let the market decide’. If you let competition deal with this, you will naturally have a fare cap.

“If you’re serving secondary destinations, the wages are very different to those in Riyadh and Jeddah, so you can’t charge prices that are too high.

“I welcome competition. Competition can only bring benefits to the country because you will bring more pressure for improvements in the infrastructure and for lifting the monopolies.”

He questioned how new entrants would make any profit if they had to accept the current restrictions of high fuel prices and capped fares. And he was wary of foreign airlines using a foothold in the Saudi market to draw passengers to their own hubs for onward connections. Such a development would not help the kingdom develop its domestic air market.

## How the Saudi scene could change to avoid more failures

Saudi low-cost carrier Sama fell by the wayside in 2010 after racking up substantial debts as it attempted to compete in the Saudi domestic market.

The airline’s former chief commercial officer (CCO), Sudeep Ghai, now a partner in London-based airline and airport consultants Athena Aerospace, explained some of the reasons behind its failure.

“I was the founding CCO and took the airline to launch. And the key critical constraints at launch was the effective subsidisation of fuel at Saudi Arabian Airlines, the public service obligations (PSOs), the domestic fare cap, which applied to economy travel, and the initial view that international services would have to be held off for 18 months.”

The percentage of PSOs was, he said: “Significant enough when a small airline is building up from scale and trying to square away client expectations of flying routes with smaller aircraft on a commercial basis.

“It was our expectation that the [fare cap] constraints would be relaxed. They weren’t. Partly because of politics, the influence wielded by Saudi Arabian Airlines and a failure to grasp that low fare travel would present more customers with choice and encourage travel.”

Ghai believed that both subsidised fuel and the ability to set ticket prices at a more realistic level would have been needed if Sama was to have survived. “But you also needed a government and regulator that would actively pursue the development of bilateral relations with other countries in the region and the development of a support infrastructure – ground handling, maintenance and engineering, airport management and catering.”

Adding to Sama’s problems, it “picked old 737-300 aircraft that struggled in the hot-and-high environment of Saudi Arabia. Sama also did not scale up operations fast enough to build economies of scale: the fleet never got beyond six units when it needed to approach 15 before the airline had critical mass”.

Ghai added: “At present the introduction of foreign operators could force a positive change but this may be at the expense of underdeveloped local operators. The risk is without this being clearly thought through any initial negative impact could persuade the authorities to retrench, not because liberalisation is bad but more because the execution might be suboptimal.”

He believed that the following changes have to be made to the air transport scene in Saudi Arabia to allow newcomers to prosper:

- Saudi Arabian Airlines to compete on a level playing field – no fuel subsidies;
- Development of an aviation support infrastructure with healthy suppliers – catering, fuel, ground handling, maintenance etc;
- No restrictions on domestic pricing;
- No PSO routes – run aviation on a commercial basis;
- Development of a proactive regulatory framework that focuses on developing new bilaterals;
- Investment in training and developing a workforce capable of competing with the best in the world;
- Development of a strong and positive reputation for tourism in the holiest country for 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide.

*The world's low-cost carriers (LCCs) converged on London for the 10th edition of the World Low Cost Airlines Congress in September.*

**Keith Mwanalushi** reports.

# Air Arabia and flydubai shine at world congress

**T**he congress yet again provided the critical platform to address a number of key issues facing global LCCs and the MENA region was represented by participation from Air Arabia and flydubai.

Top of the agenda were the usual commercial challenges associated with distribution, ancillary revenue, route development, revenue management and customer loyalty.

Day one of the three-day event was devoted to route development and among the issues discussed was how to capture untapped markets, and building a brand for medium and long haul models. The delegates also shared experiences on how to launch a profitable airline in highly competitive emerging markets.

On day two, Adel Abdullah Ali, Group CEO at Air Arabia, during a CEO brainstorming session, described the profit indicators for growing profitability in a maturing market. Other airlines included in the session were Vueling, Norwegian Air Shuttle and Wizz Air.

Ghaith Al Ghaith, CEO of flydubai, also used the event to explain, during a presentation, how fast-growing airlines can successfully enable trade, tourism and transport. "We were like men who climbed a mountain and reached the top," Al Ghaith told the gathering. "But when we looked down we still wanted to go higher to realise our goals. Despite all of our achievements, we still have ambition for more."

Another major topic was pioneering Wi-Fi to drive new revenue for LCCs and how new technologies can improve on the data guzzling

systems that are available today. With technology in mind, flydubai scooped the award for Best Ancillary Revenue Innovation for its in-flight entertainment (IFE) system at the Budgets World Low Cost Airlines Congress awards.

With votes cast by a distinguished panel of judges, flydubai was praised for its on-going commitment to innovation for its IFE system, while staying true to its low-cost philosophy. Al Ghaith said: "Winning this award is a significant achievement for flydubai and highlights our position as a force for innovation within the worldwide low-cost aviation community.

"Our accolades include becoming the only airline in the world to show movies in high definition when we launched our IFE system in November 2010. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the judging panel for voting for us and for their recognition of flydubai."

Votes swung towards flydubai's IFE system because of the 'fibre-to-the-screen' system, which has broken new ground in IFE, due to the fibre-optic technology enabling movies to be shown in high definition in the air for the first time.

In addition to increased choice, flydubai also evolved its payment model in March 2012, moving from a pay-per-view to a pay-to-access format. Passengers can opt for the basic package for Dh10, which includes all TV programmes, audio and games, or the premium

package for Dh30, which includes everything in the basic package plus movies. Daily newspapers in English and Arabic, flydubai news, the route map and information are free on all flights.

Several networking discussions took place on how to leverage new IT technologies to streamline LCC operations. Following the event, Air Arabia signed a deal with OAG, the expert in airline schedule data, to adopt schedule analysis tools. Air Arabia is the region's first customer for the new, state-of-the-art 'OAG Analyser' system.

According to OAG, it is an online tool for extracting real meaning and insight from airline schedules data. By interrogating OAG's databases, 'OAG Analyser' offers Air Arabia rapid access to detailed reports ranging from airline and airport route development trends to aircraft usage patterns.

"At Air Arabia, we always make use of valuable tools and systems to optimise efficiency and support our growth. We are confident this new system will support the airline's schedule proposition and market research," said Adel Abdullah Ali.

**Rapidly expanding flydubai (right) and Air Arabia (below) were the success stories at the low cost airlines world congress.**



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## UAE's Rotana drives ahead as a scheduled carrier

*The UAE may be geographically small but, as Alan Dron reports, continuing surface travel challenges have led to a local carrier starting domestic air services.*

It's not often that a business jet operator changes course and develops into an airline, but Rotana Jet of Abu Dhabi has recently made the jump.

However, although it started life in 2010 operating executive services with a Gulfstream 450, Rotana Jet had always planned to be a scheduled carrier, said commercial and planning director Rajendran Vellapalath.

Operating executive jet services was seen as a way to get into the aviation business.

From its base at Abu Dhabi's Al Bateen executive aviation airport, Rotana Jet began operating scheduled services in June 2012 to Sir Bani Yas and Delma islands off the coast of the emirate with two Embraer ERJ-145 regional jets.

This was followed in September with the announcement of domestic services from Abu Dhabi International Airport to Al Ain, Sharjah, Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah. Fujairah and Al Ain began that month, with Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah due to follow later. Ruwais is also due to join the route network.

### Untapped market

There is, said Vellapalath, an untapped market for internal flights between the UAE's seven emirates. Although the distances between Abu Dhabi and some of these points are small in geographic terms (around 215km to RAK, for example), driving to Ras Al Khaimah or Fujairah can easily take more than three hours – considerably longer at rush hours.

All these new domestic services are double daily; having both morning and evening rotations was considered important when the services were conceived, said Vellapalath.

Waves of international flights arrive in Abu Dhabi in early morning and Rotana Jet's morning service is synchronised with them. Similarly, the evening sectors are timed to allow passengers arriving from the outlying emirates to connect with departing late night long-haul services.

At the time of writing, the company was in discussions with the UAE regulatory authorities over creating a small transfer facility to domestic



**Rotana Jet believes sufficient people will be willing to abandon cars for aircraft to make the services viable.**

**Rajendran Vellapalath**

destinations at Abu Dhabi. It was also looking at the possibility of arriving passengers not having to clear immigration and customs formalities until they reached their final destination.

Rotana Jet believes that sufficient people will be willing to abandon cars for aircraft to make the services viable. It will take around 30 minutes to fly to Sharjah, 45 to RAK or Fujairah. A passenger arriving from Europe at, say, 8am, could be resting in his hotel at Fujairah by late morning, saving a couple of hours compared to driving. "For people who have spent six or seven hours on a flight, facing an extra two or three hours on the road to reach their final destination is not great," said Vellapalath.

He also sees the flights appealing to domestic tourists who want a day-trip to the northern emirates.

Rotana Jet's owner, Dr Sheikh Ahmed bin Saif Al-Nahyan, a former chairman of Etihad, touched on this at the official announcement of the new services in September, noting "the need to foster development in the tourism industry".

### Face competition

A third source of passengers is likely to be Abu Dhabi-based UAE federal government staff, who live at the far end of the country.

Rotana Jet will face competition from RAK Airways, which in September announced not only RAK-Abu Dhabi scheduled services but the benefit of a codesharing agreement with UAE national carrier Etihad Airways. (See story page 84).

A similar codesharing arrangement is a development also being studied by Rotana Jet.

However, Vellapalath believed that Rotana Jet's higher frequency would prove a bigger draw. He also argued that Rotana Jet would have much better economics on the route with its 50-seat ERJ-145s, against RAK's larger Airbus A320 for its service.

However, the company is not abandoning the charter market. It was due to receive an Airbus A319 in 50-seat configuration (18 business, 32 economy) to help cater for enquiries that come not only from the UAE and GCC nations but also Africa.

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*Qatar's long-running quest to find a new fighter to replace its Mirage 2000s – part of a wider air force modernisation programme – seems to be entering the final phase. Jon Lake reports.*

## Qatar fighter choice still up in the air



Evaluations are underway for the Mirage replacement.

The Dassault Rafale, Boeing F-15 and Boeing F/A-18E/F have been slugging it out in the Qatar heat during July, August and September with in-country evaluations taking place.

Two Armée de l'Air Rafales were deployed to Doha in July 2012 (having been sighted there on July 8), while two Super Hornets flew in from a nearby US carrier at the end of August. Finally two USAF F-15Es were flown from RAF Lakenheath to Qatar for evaluation in early September.

These in-country evaluations are believed to have followed preliminary assessments in the US and France. Certainly Qatar conducted a Rafale technical assessment at Istres in March or April 2012.

A circa 20-flight Qatari evaluation of the Eurofighter Typhoon in the UK was scheduled for April 2011, but was cancelled because the personnel involved on the Qatari side were all involved in the Libyan operations. This was never rescheduled after the war amid reports that Qatar had been unhappy with the costs being quoted by the UK MoD for flying RAF aircraft. But, whatever the reason, the Typhoon now appears to have slipped off Qatar's shortlist.

The F-16, by contrast, appears to have joined that shortlist, with reports that Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, the Crown Prince of Qatar and deputy supreme commander of the Qatari Armed Forces, had been talking about the possibility of Qatar buying either the F-16 or the Rafale during July 2012.

As long ago as March 2004 Qatar was reported to be evaluating a range of Western fighters, including the US Lockheed Martin F-16, the French Dassault Rafale, Sweden's Saab JAS 39 Gripen and the quadrinational Eurofighter Typhoon.

The Qatari requirement was thought to be for between 24 and 36 aircraft, making much more than a simple replacement and modernisation of the current fighter fleet. Either 24 or 36 aircraft would mark a significant expansion from the present force of nine single-seat Mirage 2000-5EDAs and three two-seat Mirage 2000-5DDAs, which serve with the sole unit of No.1 Fighter Wing, No.7 Air

Superiority Squadron at Doha Airport, and which were delivered from 1997.

The expansion is believed to form one element in a wider plan to reconfigure Qatar's armed forces for deployed operations and coalition war-fighting. This is, in turn, driven by a more robust interpretation of Qatar's constitution, which lays down that the nation's foreign policy should be driven by resolving disputes in the Middle East. Qatar is increasingly flexing its muscles as it seeks to reshape the nation's regional profile.

By January 2011 analysts were predicting that either the Rafale or a US type would be selected, with a winner to be chosen before the end of 2012. Qatar's interest had by then shifted from the F-16 to the Boeing F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and the Boeing F-15SE Silent Eagle and, indeed, to Lockheed Martin's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Any sale of the F-35 in the Gulf region would be politically complex, and would not seem likely in the near term.

Before the war in Libya, many expected that US platforms would have an edge in Qatar, since US fighters had, until then, tended to be the preferred choice among GCC states (though both Qatar and the UAE had ordered the Mirage 2000 and had operated the French Delta with conspicuous success).

The fact that the UAE and Qatar had deployed fighters to participate in the Libyan operation led others to conclude that interoperability considerations would further favour US fighter types.

However, any US advantage was eroded during Operation Odyssey Dawn, when Qatar deployed six Mirage 2000s to the military airbase at Souda on the Greek island of Crete to operate in concert with French Armée de l'Air Mirage 2000s, forging close links between the Qatari aircrew and their French counterparts in the process. This exposed the Qataris to French concepts of operations and, no doubt, to an informed view of the Dassault Rafale from the point of view of French pilots about to convert to the new jet.

Over Libya, the Qatari Mirages operated mainly in the air-to-air role, using Mica and Magic missiles, though the aircraft have gradually gained air-ground capabilities in service, including an integration of the GBU-12. Qatari pilots used this weapon for the first time during operations over Libya.

Consideration was briefly given to integrating the Sniper laser designator pod to give the aircraft a self-designation capability.

But, with slowing economic growth in the US and Europe and dwindling defence budgets, Qatar is an important buyer of both military and civilian aircraft and Boeing was not willing to sit back and let Dassault win the Qatari fighter competition without a fight. The US company opened its first office in Qatar in December 2010 and since then has been actively promoting both the Super Hornet and the F-15 as solutions to the Qatari requirement.

*With Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar having adopted the PC-21, the type is now the trainer of choice for the three largest of the GCC's six air forces.*

**Jon Lake** looks at the reasons why.

# PC-21 takes GCC trainer market by storm

**H**ot on the heels of the November 2009 order for 25 aircraft from the UAE and the May 2012 order for 55 from Saudi Arabia, the Pilatus PC-21 basic trainer has scored another sales success in the GCC region with an order for 24 PC-21s from the Qatar Emiri Air Force.

Pilatus is now tantalisingly close to its aircraft becoming standardised across the GCC.

Ironically, the PC-21's main rival is the Hawker Beechcraft (formerly Raytheon) T-6 Texan II, which is a derivative of Pilatus' previous PC-9 trainer. But, despite the advantages enjoyed by a US-supplied aircraft type, the PC-21 is proving extremely competitive and has already won orders in Switzerland (eight aircraft), Singapore (19 aircraft), and been evaluated by Australia and Spain.

Though it took the proven PC-9 as a starting point, the PC-21 is a completely new design, intended to replace different aircraft used across the spectrum of the elementary, basic, advanced (lead-in), and even the advanced (tactical weapons) training phases.

The PC-21 is being promoted by Pilatus as a flight, attack and systems trainer (FAST), with docile enough handling to be able to undertake early phase flying training, yet with sufficient performance and handling and with the right embedded training systems to be able to replicate

the 'fast jet experience' well enough to be a great advanced trainer, too.

And, says Pilatus, it does so while offering lower operating costs because it is powered by a Pratt & Whitney PT6A-68B turboprop engine, rated at 1,600-shp (1,190kW), which drives a five-bladed, graphite, Hartzell propeller.

Pilatus claims that the direct operating cost of the PC-21 is less than half of that of its nearest competing jet FAST type (and 40 times cheaper than a modern fast jet fighter), and that it costs about one quarter of a modern lead in fighter trainer (LIFT) type aircraft.

#### Tandem cockpits

Performance is impressive for a turboprop, with a maximum speed of 370kt and a sustained low-level cruising speed of 320kt.

Like most of its rivals, jet or turboprop, the PC-21 has tandem cockpits with three large colour liquid crystal displays (LCD), head-up displays (HUD), hands on throttle and stick (HOTAS) controls and Martin-Baker MkCH16C zero-zero ejection seats in each.

More unusually, the cockpit is covered by a bird strike-resistant canopy with all-round vision, and without a separate windscreen. And, uniquely in its class, the PC-21 has a new short-span wing with a swept leading edge and a high-speed profile,

which gives good performance and fast-jet type handling on approach.

The aircraft can be fitted with under-wing hardpoints for the carriage of stores, including fuel tanks and a range of weapons, but can also emulate the use of advanced air-to-air missiles and radar.

All of this means that not only can the PC-21 simulate a modern frontline fighter in some limited aspects, rather it can give the student pilot a really convincing replication of flying and operating a modern fast jet, and can be a genuinely useful preparation for frontline types, though most customers so far have procured it to operate alongside the very types of elementary and advanced trainers that it could easily also replace.

In the Gulf, the UAE announced an order of 25 PC-21s for the United Arab Emirates Air Force at the 2009 Dubai Airshow. The aircraft will replace the UAE's aging fleet of Pilatus PC-7s. But an advanced trainer is also being sought, with the Alenia M-346 provisionally selected. The first UAE PC-21 made its maiden flight on November 22 2010 and deliveries began in the first quarter of 2011.

Saudi Arabia signed a contract with BAE systems to provide 55 Pilatus PC-21 aircraft (along with 22 BAE Hawk Advanced Jet Trainer aircraft) in May 2012. First deliveries will begin in 2014.



US-built helicopters will be selected by Qatar as it renews its rotor wing fleet.

## Qatar planning a rotorcraft revolution

**Q**atar is embarking on an ambitious plan to recapitalise its military helicopter fleet. Details of the Qatari helicopter procurement plan emerged in July, when the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) asked the US Congress to approve a number of orders from Qatar.

The fleet currently comprises one squadron equipped with Aerospatiale SA342 Gazelle light attack helicopters and two squadrons equipped with about 12 Westland Sea King Commandos – one tasked with tactical transport and one with maritime reconnaissance, ASW and anti-surface vessel attack.

The initial DSCA request covered US \$3.5 billion (Dh12.85bn) worth of helicopters and associated weapons systems, support equipment, training and support, including in-country pilot and maintenance training.

The helicopters consisted of 22 Sikorsky MH-60 Seahawks (10 MH-60R Seahawks for ASW and ASuW with No. 8 Anti-Surface Vessel Squadron, and 12 MH-60S Knighthawks for tactical transport, assault and mine detection with No. 9 Multi-Role Squadron) as well as 12 UH-60 Black Hawks, with an option to purchase an additional six MH-60S aircraft at a later date.

Days later, the DSCA notified Congress of a possible \$3.0 billion Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Qatar of 24 AH-64D Apache Block III Longbow Attack Helicopters and associated equipment, parts, training and logistical support.

These would replace the ageing and lightweight Gazelles of No. 6 Close Support Squadron, operating in the close air support, armed reconnaissance and anti-tank warfare roles.

The proposed sale would include 12 AN/APG-78 Longbow fire control radars for the 24 aircraft, together with a package of weapons including 4,092 2.75inch Hydra rockets, 576 AGM-114R Hellfire II missiles and 295 FIM-92H Stinger reprogrammable micro processor (RMP) Block I missiles.

### Importance as an ally

The DSCA notifications to Congress underlined Qatar's importance as an ally, a strategic partner, and as an "important force for political and economic progress in the Middle East".

They also highlighted the enhanced interoperability that would result from any sale to Qatar, as well as the resulting improvements to Qatar's ability to meet current and future threats and to provide greater security for its critical oil and natural gas infrastructure.

As an important host to US Central Command forces in the region, Qatar is a vital training and operational partner to the US, and the acquisition of MH-60 and AH-64 helicopters will allow greater integration with US forces for exercises and operations, thereby contributing to regional security.

The DSCA concluded that the proposed sales would not alter the basic military balance in the region.

Saudi student pilots will transition from the Cirrus SR-21 to the glass cockpit PC-21 and will then go on to fly the Hawk 65/65A (with an analogue cockpit) before finally progressing to the new Hawk AJT (which has a modern glass cockpit). This leaves an obvious requirement for a glass cockpit upgrade for the Hawk 65/65A, or for a follow on Hawk AJT buy to replace these aircraft.

### Initial order

Qatar announced an initial order for 12 PC-21s on April 20 2012 but subsequently doubled the number to 24. A contract was signed to this effect on July 30 and this covered provision of the aircraft as part of a wider training system, including ground-based training devices, as well as maintenance and logistics support.

The 24 PC-21s to be delivered to Qatar will equip a new QEAF Air Academy, which will receive its first aircraft in the middle of 2014 and where training will commence during mid-2015.

PC-21 operations will be directly supported by Pilatus under a long-term incentivised performance-based support contract.

Qatar previously sent pilots overseas for basic training, conducting advanced training on the Alpha Jet in-country.

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## Trials and tribulations for new GCC tankers

*The adoption of the A330 MRTT by the two largest air forces in the GCC marks the beginning of a new era for the region's air arms, conferring a hitherto unknown degree of independence from tankers operated by coalition partners.*

**Jon Lake reports.**

**T**hough it was not selected to meet the US Air Force's KC-X requirement, the superior payload/range and operating characteristics of the Airbus A330 multi-role tanker transport (MRTT) has won most of the other competitions it has been involved in.

The type has been selected by the Royal Air Force, the Royal Australian Air Force, the UAE Air Force and Air Defence (UAE AF&AD) and the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF).

The United Arab Emirates announced that it had signed a memorandum of understanding with Airbus to purchase three A330 MRTTs in 2007 and a formal contract signature was announced in February 2008. Saudi Arabia finalised its agreement to purchase three A330 MRTTs on January 3 2008, and announced an order for three additional aircraft in July 2009.

Like the RAAF's KC-30s and the UAE's A330-243 MRTTs, the Saudi aircraft have a universal aerial refuelling receptacle slipway installation (UARRSI) above the fuselage to allow it to refuel in flight from another boom-equipped tanker. The Saudi aircraft are powered by General Electric CF6-80 engines and are fitted out in a two-class layout with 30 first-class and 236 'economy' seats. The UAE aircraft have Rolls-Royce Trent 700 engines and 16 first class and 240 'economy' seats.

The first of the UAE's three aircraft was deployed to Al Dhafra in the UAE in March-April 2012 for operational evaluation, using Mirage 2000 and F-16E/F receivers to prove the under-wing pods and the centreline boom respectively.

Dual and single-seat Mirages were flown during the trials, the two-seater with under-wing tanks and missiles and the single-seater with missiles and a centreline tank. The A330 MRTT was then flown back to Getafe, where it was used for tests and trials, and for the training of initial UAE AF&AD aircrews.

The second UAE aircraft was due to be delivered in September 2012 but after arriving at Getafe (from Toulouse) on August 16, it lost its refuelling boom during a routine flight test on September 10 while flying over Extremadura. The boom is designed to break away in certain circumstances to avoid damage to the fuselage. This was the second time an

Airbus A330 MRTT had lost its boom in flight, the first incident occurred in January 2011 while an Australian A330 tanker was refuelling a Portuguese Air Force F-16 over water.

The aircraft will now have to undergo repairs and the installation of a replacement boom, which will delay its delivery.

The third and final UAE aircraft, due for delivery in December 2012, may now be the first to enter service.

The first of six A330-202 MRTTs for the RSAF's 24 Squadron recently undertook trials with a pair of 66 Squadron Tornado IDS and a pair of Third Squadron Typhoons, which arrived at the Airbus Military facility at Getafe on June 21 (supported by a pair of C-130H Hercules) for refuelling trials that were conducted from June 25-29. This marked the first return of Saudi Typhoons to Europe following their deliveries.

### Flight training

Crews had started flight training on the first RSAF A330 MRTT with Airbus Military instructors in Spain during October 2011, qualifying in the air transport and air-to-air refuelling roles using the under-wing Cobham 905E pods and centreline boom. This aircraft was formally handed over to the RSAF in mid-November 2011, but remained at Getafe for training, testing and trials.

The second aircraft was held at Getafe waiting delivery (scheduled for July 2012), where Saudi crews were undergoing conversion training.

Training of the second Saudi crew began at about the same time that the second aircraft was delivered.

The third RSAF A330 MRTT is undergoing conversion by Iberia at Madrid-Barajas and is scheduled for delivery in December 2012. The remainder are to be delivered in 2014-2016. 24 Squadron forms part of the RSAF's 6 Wing at Prince Sultan Air Base at Al Kharj, which is home to the RSAF's existing tanker fleet. This presently comprises seven Boeing 707-based KE-3As, which serve with the co-located 23 Squadron and seven Lockheed Martin KC-130Hs, which serve with 32 Squadron.

All this leads to the intriguing possibility of the RSAF and the UAE AF&AD offering their own tankers in support of coalition operations.



Dassault Rafale is still in the frame for Kuwait role.

## Kuwait enhances fighter force

*While continuing to search for a new fighter to replace its ageing F/A-18C/D Hornets, Kuwait is pressing ahead with plans to upgrade 39 aircraft.*  
**Jon Lake reports.**

**U**nlike most Hornet operators, the Kuwait Air Force (Al Quwwat Aj Jawwaiya Al Kuwaitiya) did little to upgrade its aircraft after delivery of 32 F/A-18Cs and eight F/A-18Ds from October 1991.

The aircraft remain relatively spartan in terms of equipment, avionics and weapons, with no procurement of the kind of advanced weapons that other Hornet operators have embraced in recent years.

However, there are signs that this may be changing and that the KAF may be about to upgrade the Hornet capabilities.

On June 28 this year the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency notified Congress of a possible Foreign Military Sale of 43 joint helmet mounted cueing systems – including spare parts, support equipment, tools and test equipment, personnel training and training equipment, publications and technical data, US Government and contractor technical and logistics personnel services and other related elements of program and logistics support – to the Government of Kuwait, at an estimated cost is \$51 million.

The provision of the joint helmet mounted cueing system would dramatically improve the air-to-air combat capability of the Kuwaiti Hornets, especially if combined with a modern high off-boresight missile like the AIM-9X version of the Sidewinder. Helmet mounted cueing systems also improve air-to-ground capabilities.

At the same time, Kuwait continues to explore the possibility of acquiring new fighters to replace its two squadrons of F/A-18s (No.s 9 and 25 at Ahmed Al Jaber airbase), and recently evaluated a pair of Italian air force Eurofighter Typhoons from the 4<sup>o</sup> Stormo that were deployed to Kuwait during July.

Despite very high ambient temperatures (reportedly 53°C) and high winds (40mph), the Typhoon impressed, though some of the industry personnel involved were surprised at the

Kuwaiti emphasis on the carriage and delivery of dumb bombs.

Kuwaiti interest in a new fighter began a few years ago and then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that discussions had begun on the sale of between 14 and 28 Rafales during his visit to the Gulf in February 2008. But, in March 2010, the proposed Rafale buy was derailed and questions were asked in the Kuwait Parliament by the four-man Islamist group known as the Development and Reform Bloc.

### Influence the ministry

Jamaan al-Harbash, of the Development and Reform Bloc, claimed that unnamed officials with “vested business interests” were trying to influence the ministry to buy the Rafale, and highlighted the appointment of the former head of the Kuwait military office in Paris (who favoured the Rafale) to command the air force, contrasting this with the ministry technical team that had recommended against buying the Rafale, labelling it as being technically inferior to other aircraft on offer and more expensive.

By March 2011, the Kuwait Air Force was said to have told the Pentagon that it intended to order the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, in its Block II form with the Raytheon AN/APG-79 active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar.

By December 2011 it was being reported that Boeing was offering the F-15SE Silent Eagle to Kuwait as well as the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, and in February 2012 there were reports that the Kuwaiti Defence Ministry had received calls from the French side to reactivate contacts on the Rafale aircraft. These calls were obviously successful, as Kuwait then scheduled a flight evaluation of the Rafale in June 2012.

Kuwaiti sources suggest that neither Defence Minister, Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, nor the Emir, Sabah Al-Ahmad, are in any hurry to decide which fighter to procure and that evaluation and analysis of alternatives is continuing.

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# Turkey firming up its plans for F-35

*On September 4 this year it was reported that Turkey would use funds from its Defence Industry Support Fund to purchase a second pair of F-35 Lightning Joint Strike Fighters. Jon Lake looks at the small beginnings to what should be a much larger programme.*

The new F-35s, due for delivery in 2016, follow the first pair of aircraft ordered in January and expected in 2015.

In Turkey, the aircraft is better known as the F-35 Müri terek Taarruz Uçacı (MTU), and the familiar JSF acronym is little used.

On January 5 this year Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, chairing the Defence Industry Executive Committee, authorised the Undersecretariat for Defence Industries to open negotiations with Lockheed Martin for the purchase of just two F-35 multi-role combat fighters.

Lockheed Martin had expected Turkey to order an initial six aircraft.

Then, in February, Turkish Defence Minister İsmet Yılmaz confirmed that Turkey still intended to purchase 100 F-35s, stating in writing to the Turkish parliament that: "We are not currently considering abandoning the purchase of the planes." He outlined the expected cost of \$16 billion.

The Turks had previously put the planned purchase on hold because of concerns over technology transfer and access to source codes, which the US Congress has so far refused to share with any of the JSF customer nations.

Turkey is understood to be especially interested in being able to control and programme the aircraft's identification friend or foe (IFF) after it found that the F-16s' IFF system always identified Israeli air force aircraft as friendly, necessitating the design of a new IFF system by ASELSAN.

Assuming that this difficulty can be resolved, one way or another, Turkey may even eventually buy more than the 100 F-35s now planned, with some analysts predicting an eventual total of more than 120 aircraft.

The first Turkish F-35 unit is expected to be 172 Filo at Erhaç, part of the 7th Ana Jet Üssü (7th Wing). 171 Filo will

be the second unit, transferring its F-4E 2020 Terminators to 111 Filo (the other remaining Phantom fighter squadron) at Eskişehir, before 111 Filo and 112 Filo themselves convert to the F-35.

On June 12 112 Filo stood down, retiring its 18 F-4ETM aircraft, previously upgraded under the Simsek programme, leaving just 111 and 171 Filo operational with the more extensively upgraded F-4E 2020, and 173 Filo with 15 RF-4ETM Isik reconnaissance aircraft, though the future of these is in doubt following the cancellation of an Israeli tactical recce pod programme.

Plans for the 132 Filo (Hançers) tactics and trials unit to receive a few F-35s have reportedly been abandoned.

## Benefit from sub-contracts

Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) and several other Turkish defence companies will benefit from sub-contracts, which will see them producing more than \$5 billion worth of F-35 components and sub-assemblies.

Turkey's military procurement chief, Murad Bayar, has been pushing for an expanded role for TAI, already scheduled to build 400 F-35 centre fuselages at a cost of US \$4 billion. Bayar has said that TAI could complete the centre fuselages for 624 F-35s for no extra investment cost, saving the programme \$3.5 billion thanks to Turkey's lower labour costs.

The only other F-35 customer in the region so far is Israel, which plans to have two squadrons, with 40 F-35s operational by 2020, and which has an eventual requirement for more than 100 Joint Strike Fighters to replace its fleet of over 300 F-16s.

Like other potential operators, Israel had wanted access to software source codes but contented itself with an agreement to integrate Israeli-compatible communications systems and datalinks, and with provision to insert some locally-built ECM and defensive electronics on its first batch of 40 aircraft, at an extra cost of just \$450 million.



The F-35 will be known as the MTU in Turkey.

# Oman gets ready to induct C-130J

Lockheed Martin has started deliveries of the C-130J Super Hercules aircraft to the Royal Air Force of Oman.

The first aircraft built for the Sultanate of Oman (actually a stretched C-130J-30 model) conducted its maiden flight in early August 2012 and was photographed on approach to Naval Air Station Fort Worth Joint Reserve Base, Texas, on August 6.

This aircraft was formally accepted in a ceremony at Lockheed Martin's Marietta facility in Georgia on August 30 2012.

Present at the ceremony were Commander Suleiman Al-Brashdy, representing the Omani government; Colonel John Drohan, the US Air Force CO of the Defense Contract Management Agency in Marietta; and George Shultz, Lockheed Martin vice president and general



Oman has begun receiving the C130-J Hercules.

manager of C-130 programmes.

This first Omani C-130J departed the Lockheed Martin facility at Marietta on September 13, transiting to Oman via the UK's Stansted airport, where it was seen on September 14.

The C-130J-30 is the first of three second-generation

Hercules on order; the contract for it having been announced on June 5 2009.

Two unstretched C-130Js (announced on August 16 2010) will also be delivered.

The Royal Air Force of Oman currently operates three C-130H models delivered between 1981 and 1983.

These equip No.16 Squadron at Seeb.

The new J-models will augment the older C-130H models, rather than replacing them, and will largely be used to support internal country operations, accessing remote, austere and inhospitable airstrips within Oman.

■ Meanwhile, the first of six C-130J-30s for the Iraqi air force made its maiden flight from Lockheed Martin's Marietta site in mid-August. This first C-130J-30 for Iraq is scheduled for delivery later this year and will join three refurbished C-130Es, which currently equip the Iraqi air force's transport arm.

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MEBAA's founding chairman Ali Al Naqbi is optimistic about business aviation in the region.



# STEPPING UP: MEBA comes of age

*This year's Middle East Business Aviation (MEBA) show sees the fusion of old and new. Liz Moscrop looks at the thought behind it.*

**A**li Al Naqbi, chairman of the Middle East Business Aviation Association (MEBAA) quoted a famous Chinese philosopher when he helped form the organisation back in 2006: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

Although the sentiment is ancient, it is as relevant today as it was when Lao-tzu wrote it somewhere around 500 BC.

Several steps into MEBAA's journey, one of its key achievements is the biennial Middle East Business Aviation show (MEBA), produced by Dubai Airshow organiser, F&E Aerospace, on the association's behalf.

A success by any criteria, this year's event – the

fifth edition – takes place from December 11 to 13 at Dubai's Al Maktoum International Airport – Dubai World Central.

F&E managing director Alison Weller, said: "Three months ahead of the show we were way ahead of where we had planned to be. We knew that a lot of local companies would book nearer the time but we have a strong showing of international exhibitors, which represent new, rather than existing business."

MEBA 2012 is offering several initiatives, such as a dedicated US pavilion. Weller explained: "Over the past few years the US business aviation market has proven its resiliency and the strong have

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survived. One of the key reasons for this survival has been the focus on those regions of the world where the market is most active – the Middle East among them.”

She added: “With budgets down and marketing dollars being scrutinised, it is beneficial for companies to invest in a show that is tailor-made and focused on their particular subset of the aviation business. The US presence will not only showcase American business aviation and values at their best but also shows how far MEBA has come in just five shows. We expect this year to be the start of more countries supporting us with national groups.”

Another step up for the show comes from new kid on the block –VIPinteriors@MEBA.

Due to a growing demand for interior repair and refurbishment capabilities in the Middle East, MEBA will also showcase a VIP interiors section, enabling companies to feature some of their latest evolutions in cabin design, engineering, completions and new interior systems.

The shrewd move to include this section reflects the fact that local VVIPs really appreciate the latest innovations on offer. For example, nine heads of state from the region are reported to have ordered Boeing’s new 747-8 Aeroloft luxury business jet, which boasts a separate cabin with sleeping quarters for eight people.

**Extra capacity**

This extra capacity, that also offers a changing room, adds nearly 400sqft to the cabin, which is housed above the main deck, between the upper deck and the tail. This gives the aircraft a massive 5,179sqft of interior space, upping the ante on the Airbus A380, which comes in at 5,146sqft. The first Aeroloft is now in a completions hangar at Lufthansa Technik’s facility in Hamburg. It is scheduled to enter service in 2014.

At the time of going to press interiors exhibitors included: Saudi Arabia’s Alsalam Aircraft Co, Switzerland’s AMAC Aerospace, Aurora, Jet Aviation, OnAir and RUAG, Monaco’s Boutsen Aviation, Sabena Technics and Vision Systems Aeronautics from France, Canadian companies Flying Colours and Tag Aeronautics, Italians Delta Interior Design, Gore Design, Lou Martin & Associates and Rockwell Collins from the US, and German outfitter Lufthansa Technik.

The interesting thing about this mix is not only its geographical spread but also the breadth of capabilities incorporated in the list. What is evident is that when it comes to outfitting a new aircraft or refitting an old one, technology is trumps, whether in cabin management systems, new seating or galleys or the invisible magic of satellite communications.

Switzerland-based OnAir, for example, recently announced that it would expand its telephony, message and Internet service to business jets. The company offers a GSM network chip and Wi-Fi cabin hotspot, which allow passengers to use mobile devices to make and receive telephone calls, exchange text or multimedia messages or access



**‘With budgets down and marketing dollars being scrutinised, it is beneficial for companies to invest in a show that is tailor-made and focused on their particular subset of the aviation business.’**

ALISON WELLER

the Internet. The firm currently provides this package as a retrofit service, but this could soon change.

Another interesting development comes from Idair, a joint venture between Lufthansa Technik and Panasonic Avionics. The company produces Eclipsair, a wireless “infotainment” system that delivers news, video, audio, data and flight information through one access point, plus a web-based media server directly to the user’s mobile device.

This is becoming essential, since apps form a major part of cabin management today. Back in 2010 NBAA attendees were wowed when Gulfstream introduced an app that would turn passengers’ iPods or iPhones into a remote control that would work everything in the cabin, from window shades to the entertainment system.

Today there are apps that can dig even deeper

into the aircraft’s audio visual on demand (AVOD) server, and allow the viewer to watch anything contained therein on their iPad or iPhone (digital rights permitting).

Earlier this year Rockwell Collins introduced its CabinRemote, an app that adds a whole new dimension to its airshow moving map software, effectively turning the aircraft ‘invisible’ as it flies over different areas of the world.

In terms of less exotic, but still practical interior comforts, there could be a great deal to see either at the aircraft manufacturers’ booths or on the static park. Both Dassault and Bombardier have introduced showers on to their jets. In a special request from a customer, the French airframer recently added a shower to its flagship Falcon 7X. The booth features a rain shower attachment, plus an outside window that can be dimmed for privacy.

Bombardier, meanwhile, already offers a shower as an optional extra on its Global 5000 and Global 6000, and Gulfstream will offer one as an option on its new G650, starting in 2013.

An even less glamorous, but intensely practical comfort option from Peterborough, Ontario-based Flying Colours, sees the addition of a proprietary smoke-extraction system to remove galley smells.

**Facilities at the show**

Rising traffic in the region has led to an increasing focus on facilities at the show. With the spotlight on BusinessAirports@MEBA companies such as ExecuJet, Fujairah International Airport, Hadid International, Harrods Aviation, London Biggin Hill, Jet Aviation, Jetex, Rizon Jet and TAG Farnborough will have the opportunity to promote their FBO services to encourage owners and operators of business jets to route through their airports.

The Gulf has remained a stable and increasingly influential market in VIP helicopters and Bell Helicopter and Hawker Pacific are among the first to show their enthusiasm for the new Helicopters@MEBA focus area.

Another addition is Luxury@MEBA, which is an opportunity for luxury goods and services companies to get their products in front of high-net-worth individuals and corporations visiting or exhibiting at MEBA.

A study by global management consultants Bain & Company predicted that the global market for top-end products would exceed €200bn (\$259 billion) in 2012 and that the Middle East luxury market would grow by 15%.

The new focus areas may prove to be a permanent fixture as the show moves forward. Weller explained: “The demand for these products and services are strong and as anticipated we have generated a lot of interest in all three focus areas enabling MEBA to become a one-stop hub for an owner, operator or prospective buyer to be able to source, purchase, fit out and operate a business aircraft in the region.”

Continued  
on Page 62



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 60

MEBA also plays host to several official events. On Sunday December 9 three important meetings take place: The MEBA operators meeting, the grey market seminar and a few IS-BAO workshops. The following day there is a conference on the future of business jets in the Middle East.

These forums are a core part of MEBA's strategy to promote business aviation in the Gulf.

Formed in June 2006, the association's first step on its thousand-mile journey was to recognise that business aviation players operating throughout the Middle East and North Africa region needed to speak with a single voice. They also needed to learn lessons from more mature markets, while retaining the unique characteristics of the region.

Al Naqbi said: "Business aviation is an essential tool for economic development and wealth-generation... Sadly, it is often misunderstood. This incorrect perception is derived mostly from the cost angle alone, condemning it as an expensive adjunct that can easily be dispensed with."

#### Single point of contact

MEBAA is aiming to change that by being a single point of contact in presenting the face of business aviation in the Gulf to government, media and industry. It is also the means by which the regional business aviation community will address government legislation and raise public perceptions of the industry.

The local grey market is a particular bugbear and an issue Al Naqbi has fought passionately to resolve. He said: "The grey market in business aircraft charter occupies centre stage in most of the business aviation forums in recent times. It is believed around 50% of charter operations are taken away by this unscrupulous sector of industry."

He cited reasons such as uninformed customers attracted by immediate gains of lower rates, crooked charter operators "out to make a quick buck," and indifferent aircraft owners who are

## Help at hand for MEBA hotels

**With MEBA moving to its new venue at Dubai World Central, regular visitors to the business aviation show – or indeed its big sister event, the Dubai Air Show – are likely to be facing a major decision: Where to stay.**

**DWC is just 20 minutes from the Dubai Marina and the beachfront hotels but is quite a drive from the properties that proved popular during the years the Airport Expo building at Dubai International was open.**

**But help is at hand. Experienced travel firm Events in Focus is the show's official travel partner and has secured special rates at a number of hotels from the basic, to the five-star.**

**And as a bonus the travel firm is arranging shuttle buses to its key hotels for its guests.**

**Anybody interested in booking at the special MEBA rate should contact Events in Focus's Carrie Ann Spurgeon on [cs@eventsinfocus.net](mailto:cs@eventsinfocus.net) or via the accommodation link on the MEBA website.**

unaware of the misuse of their equipment. The recent dire economic climate did not help.

He explained: "The complete picture concerning consequences of this part of business is yet to be understood by all the players in business aviation since no major incident has occurred. So far grey market operation has remained as illegal but not unsafe, but it may not remain so for ever."

He suggested one way to educate passengers would be to circulate the European Business Aviation Association (EBAA)'s brochure named 'Is my flight legal? Your rights as business aircraft charter passenger.' This leaflet outlines in simple terms vital questions to ask; such as does the provider have an Air Operator's Certificate (AOC)? It also highlights the importance of flight permits to regions, flight plans, safety aspects, and crew qualifications, as

well as the consequences of illegal flights on people's personal insurance.

Al Naqbi urged airports and air traffic controllers to be vigilant and to work together to stamp out the practice. He said: "Intelligence is the key to arrest and eliminate any illegal activity. Trade associations like MEBA, with its membership drawn from various international branches of business aviation, could be the nodal agencies for collection of such relevant data."

The combination of focused education sessions, key exhibitors and relevant visitors means that MEBA is going from strength to strength. The 2010 edition attracted 6,200 attendees from 77 countries, a 13% increase over the previous show in 2008. More than 500 VIPS attended, including a number of sheikhs from the region, plus other key buyers and buying influencers.

Two years ago saw 53 business aircraft on display and some 338 exhibitors from 33 countries rock up.

#### More buzzed

Weller admits to being excited about the show's prospects. She said: "We are in a new venue this year, with a duty free shop right in the middle of the exhibition area. I am much more buzzed than I was in 2010. The industry is in better shape today than after the downturn of 2008."

Al Naqbi, too, is philosophical about the next phase of MEBA's thousand-mile journey, and recently told members: "It is said that business jets are the first to arrive in areas of the world that will see the next spate of industrial growth and economic development. We continue to need you to help us to take the next steps in our journey of a thousand miles."

Perhaps, then, it is time to look to a more modern philosopher for guidance. Contemporary Moroccan thinker Professor Abdallah Laroui wrote: "It is impossible to oppose modernism except through surpassing it, and it is not possible to surpass it except through assimilating it."

MEBA this year does just that.





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Mike Berry: "The additional 12,300sqft of terminal space will allow us to efficiently grow our business by up to 50% while ensuring service levels are improved to meet customer expectations."

# ExecuJet expands to meet demands

**E**xecuJet Middle East, based at Dubai International Airport, is one company expanding to cope with increasing demand for business aviation services, by taking over the largest dedicated business aviation terminal in the Middle East.

Since the start of October, the ExecuJet FBO now includes the terminal building previously managed by Executive Flight Service (EFS) and offers additional lounge space, expanded customs and immigration services, including e-gate services and duty-free shopping.

The company will also manage all ground handling for aircraft using its Dubai FBO facilities.

Mike Berry, managing director, ExecuJet Middle East, said: "We are very excited about this significant expansion to our Dubai FBO. The additional 12,300sqft of terminal space will allow us to efficiently grow our business by up to 50% while ensuring service levels are improved to meet customer expectations. We will also be investing in airside vehicles, including limousines and baggage vehicles, as well as extra ramp-side equipment."

He added: "Our introduction of full ground handling services in Dubai is

*Fixed based operations (FBO) in the Middle East are increasing their presence and services to accommodate the growing demand in the region and outside it.*

**Marcella Nethersole reports.**

another important development, giving us an enhanced level of control over aircraft arrivals and departures. This change will enable ExecuJet to offer an even more efficient service to passengers and crew."

The newly acquired terminal includes eight lounges and a spacious arrivals zone with guest 'meet and greet' areas. And the company also offers dedicated VIP parking and convenient limousine drop-off and pick-up access.

ExecuJet is also extending its strategic partnership with Bilen Air Service in Istanbul to include aircraft handling at Sabiha Gokchen Airport.

The service will provide 24/7 support capability to Istanbul following the recent introduction of general aviation (GA) flight restrictions at Istanbul Atatürk Airport.

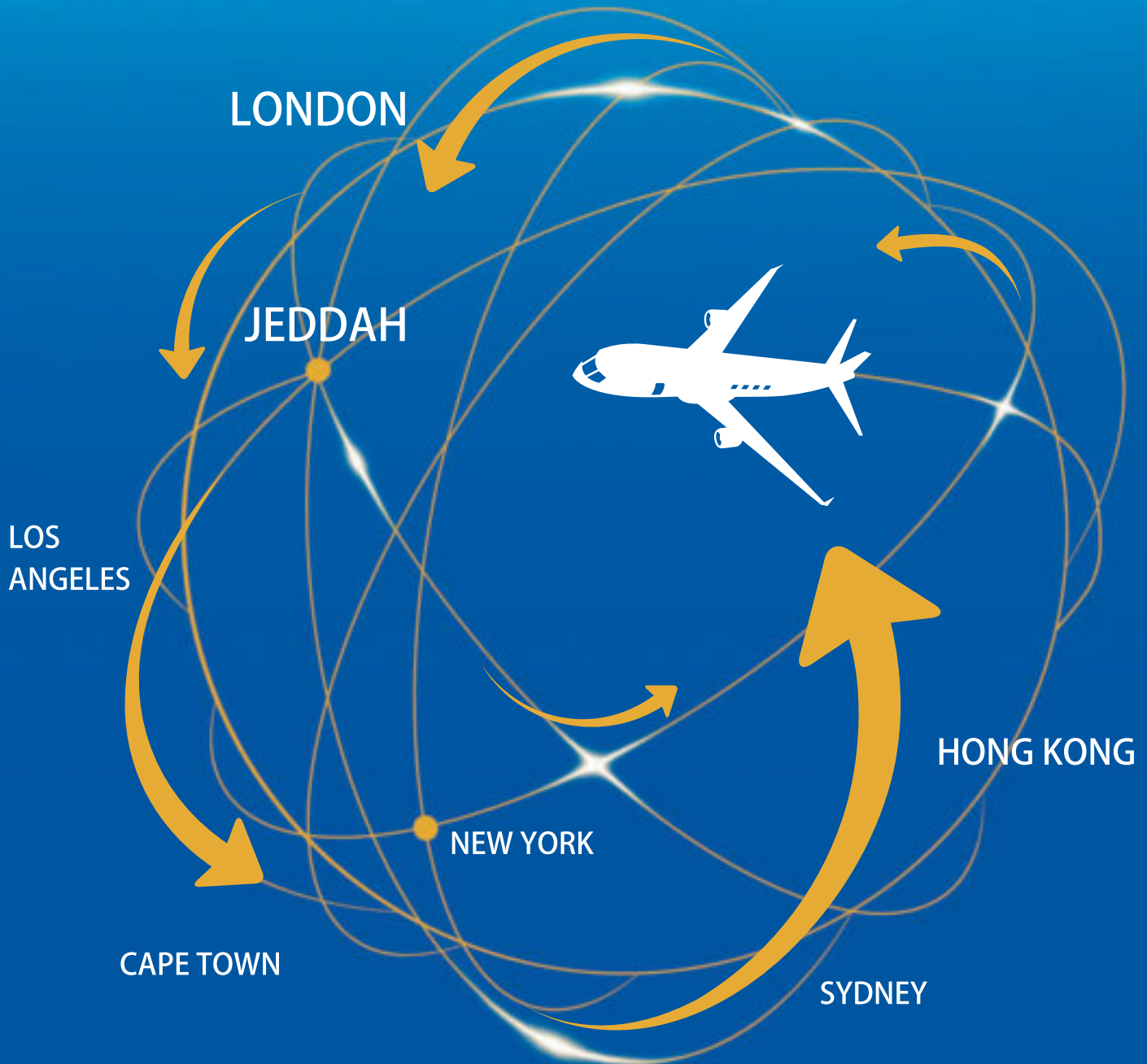
The two companies joined forces in 2011 offering FBO services at Istanbul Atatürk Airport.

Tolga Asan, assistant general manager, Bilen Air Service, said: "Istanbul Atatürk Airport currently has NOTAM restrictions in place, limiting foreign general aviation movements to certain hours. ExecuJet and Bilen Air Service are therefore extending our handling services to Sabiha Gokchen Airport to ensure our customers continue to be fully supported in the city."

Mark Abbott, ExecuJet Aviation Group FBO director, added: "Turkey is a key location for ExecuJet as the country bridges the gap between Europe and the Middle East. Our clients are accustomed to an excellent service, so we are pleased we can continue to provide our usual 24/7 offering despite the restrictions at Istanbul Atatürk Airport."



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## Wide implications of AMAC's third hangar

Middle Eastern aircraft are the mainstay of the AMAC Aerospace business in Basle, and in September the company inaugurated its third maintenance and completion hangar for wide-body aircraft.

The opening of the new state-of-the-art 8,200sqm hangar is the catalyst for the company's entrée into providing maintenance for wide-bodied aircraft capability it plans to introduce from early 2013. AMAC gained European EASA Part 145 approval to undertake heavy base maintenance on Boeing 777 series (2010) and the Airbus A330/A340 Series (2012) and is expecting to receive B747-400 / B747-8i approval later on this year. In May AMAC was approved by Boeing as a Boeing Warranty Service Centre.

CEO Kadri Muhiddin said: "We have done phenomenally well in winning completion, refurbishment and maintenance work contracts to the point that we have a secure and stable workload until 2014 and at present we are in dialogue for work beyond 2014."

A UAE government Boeing 777 was the showpiece backdrop to the official opening event, while in the hangars there were several ACJ's and BBJ's awaiting refurbishment projects.

"Now in our second phase of growing the business we are focusing on building up the maintenance side of the business. We are also very enthusiastic about our new activity supporting the Pilatus PC12-NG single engine turboprop in the lucrative Middle East market," Muhiddin said.

The inauguration of the new Basel facility comes just one week after AMAC launched a 1,500sqm hangar at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport in Turkey, where from January 2013 it will be providing maintenance support for the versatile, high-speed six-seater PC-12NG turboprop (see story page 104).



## First class service at London Stansted

Private and corporate aviation operators from MENA making flights to London Stansted can now expect first class FBO services from Universal Aviation.

The company recently inaugurated its completely renovated 10,712sqft FBO at Stansted Airport. The refurbishment includes all-new crew and passenger lounges, a state-of-the-art business centre and video conferencing facility, two client meeting rooms, private screening facilities, and ultra-modern showers and changing rooms. And, through the acquisition of Air Culinaire, it also has two owned kitchens in London and Paris to better meet the in-flight catering needs of its clients.

"Unlike other European cities, operators travelling to London have many airport options and, while our

customers were always delighted with the quality of our services at Universal Aviation Stansted, we felt it was important to upgrade our facilities to meet the changing profile of our customers, many of whom make quick short-haul flights to the London area and require more amenities for both crew and passengers," said Jonathan Howells, Universal's regional vice president, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

"Having an enhanced facility at London Stansted is fundamental to meeting the needs of our customers in the region and globally, as it is not only home to our ground-support business but also to our 24/7 European Operations Centre, which offers trip facilitation within Europe and globally."

## JetAviation boost to customer support

Jet Aviation is now offering management support services to help customers achieve full compliance with the European Union's Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) Phase III requirements.

Phase III of the EU ETS will place a broader cap on emissions in January 2013. To fulfill Phase III requirements, all aircraft operators flying into or out of any airport within the European Union must submit updated, detailed monitoring plans, and ensure registry accounts are open in the appointed member states.

Jet Aviation – which has facilities in Dubai and Saudi Arabia – provides comprehensive compliance services to help customers meet all procedural requirements of the EU ETS, from Phase III prerequisites to regularly monitoring flight data, calculating CO2 emissions, drafting the annual report and managing emission allowances on the Union Registry.

"This Emissions Trading System phase is going to make compliance even more demanding and time-consuming for aircraft operators," said Matthias Gruber, manager, EU ETS services. "Our turnkey compliance solution will help clients seamlessly meet these new requirements. It is particularly helpful to small operators."



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Cessna's Citation Ten has taken back the title of the world's fastest civilian aircraft.

*The latest generation of business jets are focusing again on speed. Alan Peaford looks at two models that are taking it to the limit.*

# BATTLE OF THE SPEED MERCHANTS

It was just over 100 years ago that Clyde Vernon Cessna, a farming engineer from Iowa in the USA, made his first airplane – the silverwing – and began a legacy that led to the aircraft company still bearing his name today.

Famously, Clyde once said: “Speed is the only reason for flying.” That philosophy is still bearing fruit in today’s Cessna company in Wichita, Kansas.

Back in 1996 Cessna introduced a new flagship for its Citation family of business jets. Called the Citation X (the X is the Roman numeral for 10) the aircraft could outstrip the famous Learjets and all but one civil airliner. And when that one, Concorde, finally ceased operations in November 2003, the Citation X, with its top speed of Mach 0.92, took over the mantle as the world’s fastest civil aircraft.

For eight years Cessna employees basked in the glory of being business aviation’s speed kings – but then the conservative king of comfort, Gulfstream, took the wind from their sails with a flight test of its newest aircraft.

The Gulfstream G650 had been designed to head the class for long-range, large business jets. The Savannah, Georgia company – now part of General Dynamics – worked with its ‘advanced technology customer

Continued on Page 70

The Gulfstream flagship is already making an impact in the region.



## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 69

advisory team'. While addressing issues of comfort and capability, speed became an issue. Gulfstream's design team set to work to see if they could deliver all of the things required. And they did.

"The G650 speaks to all that is good about business aviation: safety, security, flexibility, comfort, and capability," said Larry Flynn, president, Gulfstream. "We're extremely proud of what our entire organisation has accomplished with this aircraft."

Gulfstream announced the G650 on March 13 2008, five years after it began designing the jet. It rolled out under its own power on September 30 2009 and flew for the first time nearly two months later, on November 25.

Over the next 35 months, seven flight-test aircraft were involved in the flight-test programme, accumulating more than 3,889 hours over 1,181 flights.

Then on May 2, 2010, the G650 demonstrated its exceptional high-speed, fuel-efficient cruising capabilities when it flew at its maximum operating Mach number of 0.925 for the first time.

It achieved high-speed cruise in October 2010, when a test aircraft flew a 5,000-nautical-mile (9,260km) closed circuit at Mach 0.90 over the Atlantic Ocean in 9 hours and 45 minutes.

In February 2011 the G650 flew from Burbank to Savannah, a distance of more than 1,900 miles (3,045km) in just 3 hours and 26 minutes. The aircraft accomplished the mission at speeds between Mach 0.91 and 0.92 with a brief segment at the maximum operating Mach number of 0.925.

The trip set a city-pair speed record and was named a most memorable flight for speed over a recognised course by the National Aeronautic Association – and most importantly it had broken the record set by golfer Arnold Palmer in his CitationX to become the fastest civilian aircraft in the world.

In Wichita, the Cessna design team were back to the drawing boards. The then president, Jack Pelton, came to EBACE and made a bold claim: "We will not be beaten by speed!"

When Pelton left the company during the downturn there were doubts that his claim would be realised. But new company president Scott Earnest recognised the importance of the speed claims to the Cessna brand.

The result was the Citation Ten, a new variant of the X that included upgraded AE3007C2 engines with new fans, Garmin G5000 flight displays with three 14-inch screens and a heads-up display. The elliptical winglets that were available as an aftermarket option on the Citation X become standard on the new aircraft.

Cessna added an extra 38cm to the cabin to improve passenger comfort and, more importantly,

saw increased thrust, increased payload of 97kg and, vitally, a potential increase in cruise speed.

"No one was really sure just how much extra we could squeeze from it," a Cessna insider said.

Meanwhile Gulfstream was heading towards certification with the G650 and awaiting final papers from the FAA.

But at the end of August the Ten hit a new milestone. To make a point Ernest shared a platform with motor-racing idol Chip Ganassi at the GoPro Indy Grand Prix of Sonoma to announce that the super-midsize Ten had regained its title as the fastest civil aircraft in the world, having achieved Mach .935.

"At Cessna we design, engineer, manufacture and fly the fastest civil aircraft in the world – not for us, but for our customers so they can work faster, more efficiently and get the job done," Ernest said.

"Through innovation, creativity and a desire to exceed our customers' expectations, the Cessna



**The long range G650 (top) and the new super midsize Citation Ten (above) offer comfort as well as speed.**

team took the already powerful Citation Ten and made it that much better. That's why partnering with racing legend Chip Ganassi makes so much sense as he knows a little something about speed as well."

Two weeks later, the G650 received its type certificate from the FAA.

And there were no signs of disappointment that its speed record had gone. Instead, there was a clear focus on the Gulfstream claim that it had more than met expectations in all areas.

Gulfstream expects to deliver the first fully outfitted G650 business jets to customers before year-end and has received more than 200 orders for the aircraft. The Middle East region is seen as an important market for the type.

"The G650 sets the new world standard for business-jet performance, range, speed and comfort," said Jay L Johnson, chairman and chief executive officer of Gulfstream's parent corporation, General Dynamics.

"The Gulfstream team has done an outstanding job in designing and manufacturing what is already the envy of the global market and is sure to become a milestone aircraft in aviation history."

And it is a spectacular design. It offers a full three-axis, fly-by-wire system that delivers a number of benefits, including flight-envelope protection, passenger comfort, increased redundancy and reduced maintenance. The system is the result of extensive testing, leading to a redundant fly-by-wire system that exceeds certification requirements. It has a separate and dedicated back-up flight-control computer that provides an additional level of safety.

To ensure optimum system performance, the G650 uses PlaneConnect HTM. This aircraft health and trend monitoring system provides near-real-time aircraft condition monitoring by recording up to 10,000 predefined parameters, and transmits that information to the operator's maintenance department with an optional copy to Gulfstream Technical Operations.

Gulfstream can, if necessary, request additional data from the plane without any crew interaction, leading to exceptionally fast maintenance turnaround times and the ability to predict fleet maintenance trends.

Up front, the G650 is equipped with what has been described as the most advanced flight deck in general aviation.

PlaneView II includes four 14-inch, adaptive, liquid crystal displays, a standby multi-function controller that combines current display controller functionality with standby flight instruments; automatic descent mode; and a fully automatic,

three-dimensional scanning weather radar with an integral terrain database for efficient ground-clutter elimination.

The G650 has a range of 7,000nm at long-range cruise speed enabling it to link Dubai with New York.

Meanwhile Cessna is working towards certification and entry into service by the end of 2013. When delivered the Ten will be capable of pairing Dubai with London just a little bit faster than the larger Gulfstream, but one heck of lot faster than the commercial traffic that it leaves behind and below.





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# The price is right...or is it?

*Private aviation expert Kurosh Tebranchian reckons the Middle East business aviation market needs to look carefully at its prices... or stack up trouble for the future.*

**Liz Moscrop picks his brains.**

**H**ow much does a trip in a Challenger 850 from Jeddah to London cost? The smart answer is: “that depends”; the valuer would add in the variables on the day of the journey and price the flight that way. However, according to Kurosh Tebranchian, CEO of leasing and broking firm Axon Aviation, the smart method is rarely seen anywhere, and particularly not in the Middle East.

He said: “I have yet to see this model applied regularly. The charter-pricing model has to be based on not flying the same routes over and over again. What is the market rate? It is not just what everyone says is the right rate. If you don’t go in at the right level you might not make money.”

He speaks with some authority. Together with wife Niki Rokni, Tebranchian founded Aircraft Zone in London in December 2003 and by January 2006, after an initial investment of \$12 million and name change to Ocean Sky, established his own AOC and began private jet operations with two Bombardier Challenger 604s.

The pair sold their shares in Ocean Sky in December 2009. At that time the company operated 34 aircraft, employed 325 people, and had become one of the largest private jet maintenance and engineering centres in Europe with offices in seven countries. It possessed the second largest chain of FBOs in UK as well being the third largest charter broker in the UK.

Tebranchian pointed out that many Middle East charter operators base their prices on a fixed scale that they do not often re-evaluate, so the initial assumption for the market rate is incorrect. He continued: “There is a lack of understanding in the region and elsewhere of profits on a micro scale rate for making money from flights. For example, if you price at \$5,000 per hour plus the cost of landing fees, catering and FBO charges, have you got the real cost?”

“The important thing is have you factored in the true cost of your crew, your fuel, your FBO for each flight? Even pricing every five or 10 flights would be an interesting exercise, not just selling hours on what you roughly expect costs should be.”

He added that companies lose their sensitivity to pricing, which has a negative impact on the market, especially when competing organisations lower their prices.

He added: “If your competitor starts pricing at \$4,600 and you drop further from your \$5,000 per hour base, then it follows that you will not catch up with depreciation, or your real fixed costs.”

He is not the first to point out this problem. Speaking at the Dubai Airshow three years ago, Qatar Airways chief Akbar Al Baker reportedly complained about the same issue, calling on the

regional private jet industry to look at its pricing carefully.

Despite his concerns over market rates, Tebranchian is bullish about prospects for the region as a whole. He said principals seemed to be looking to buy aircraft again.

“We have two mandates from the Middle East. We have just leased a Challenger 850, and have two heavy jets from Saudi Arabia on our books to sell for their owners under the radar,” he said.

This means that Axon will approach its own trusted contacts and not advertise the aircraft on the open market. According to Tebranchian, selling such heavy metal is a recent development for the Gulf region. He believes this could be because the owners are looking to dispose of their large airliners to replace them with newer variants.

Apart from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, regionally Tebranchian reckons that Egypt may become buoyant again after the elections, with Qatar and Nigeria also interesting locations to watch.

He also said that operators looking to lease aircraft to charter in Dubai and Abu Dhabi have approached his firm. He pointed out that this is another new development for the Gulf. It would appear that fewer owners are looking to charter their jets, but that demand is so high that operators

need to make aircraft available. However,

Tebranchian cautioned “principals going to buy at MEBA will be a better indicator of the true health of market”.

**Kurosh Tebranchian:**  
“Have you factored in the true cost of each flight?”

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## Eutelsat to launch new satellite for Middle East in 2015

Eutelsat Communications has signed a contract for a new satellite from Thales Alenia Space.

Called EUTELSAT 8 West B, the high-capacity spacecraft will be launched in 2015 and be positioned at 8° West, joining satellites already operated at the adjacent 7° West position by Eutelsat and the Egyptian satellite company, NileSat.

Satellite TV broadcasting services from both

positions will be received via a single small direct-to-home (DTH) dish.

More than 30 million homes in North Africa and the Middle East are already equipped for the DTH reception of more than 800 Arabic and international channels broadcast at this position by Eutelsat and NileSat.

The new satellite will be equipped with 40

operational Ku-band transponders designed primarily to serve DTH markets in North Africa and the Middle East.

It will also carry a C-band package, with 10 operational transponders connected to footprints covering the African continent and reaching west to South America.

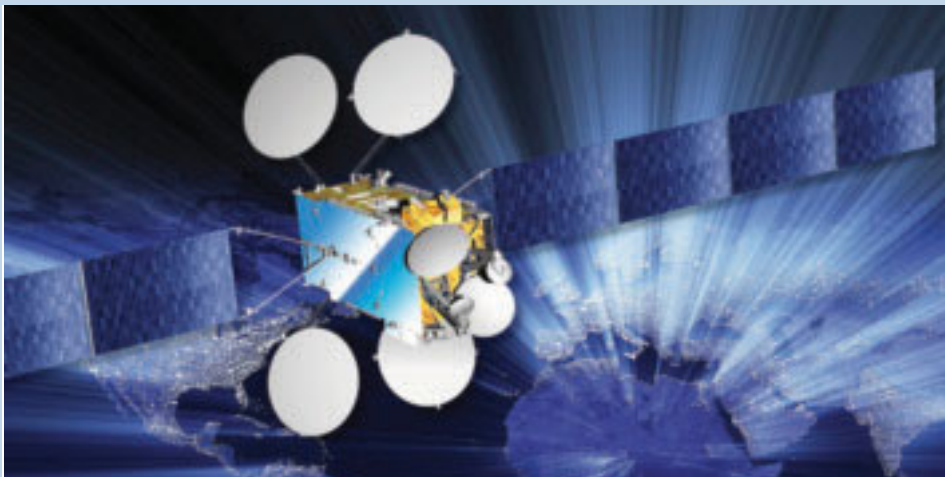
To respond to popularity, Eutelsat will also redeploy an existing high-power Ku-band satellite to 8° West in 2013. This will increase resources in advance of the launch of EUTELSAT 8 West B, enabling more broadcasters to benefit.

Michel de Rosen, Eutelsat CEO, said: "We want to ensure we are giving broadcasters the finest quality of service and headroom to grow their business."

"This new satellite programme will further equip us to deliver the highest quality of service at a video neighbourhood experiencing record demand for reaching TV homes across the Middle East and North Africa. We are also pleased to renew our confidence in Thales Alenia Space with this new order from their most state-of-the-art range of spacecraft."

Jean Loic Galle, president and CEO of Thales Alenia Space, added: "We are both pleased and proud to sign this important contract today with Eutelsat."

"EUTELSAT 8 West B is the 25th satellite built by Thales Alenia Space for Eutelsat, and it will be the 74th satellite in the Spacebus family to enter service in the global space telecommunications market."



## DubaiSat-2 ready for Russian blast-off

DubaiSat-2 is the result of five years of work by a team of 22 Emirati engineers from the Emirates Institute for Advanced Science and Technology (EIAST), operating in cooperation with the South Korean company Satrec-1.

The satellite will be launched into orbit on board a Dnepr rocket by the Moscow-based International Space Company Kosmotras (ISCK).

It will weigh 300kg, be two metres high and 1.5 metres wide and will orbit at 600km above the Earth's surface, compared with DubaiSat-1's 690km.

The orbit has also been changed from the ascending (South to North) orbit used by DubaiSat-1 to a descending orbit (North to South), which will allow both satellites to work well together and give better coverage over the UAE area.

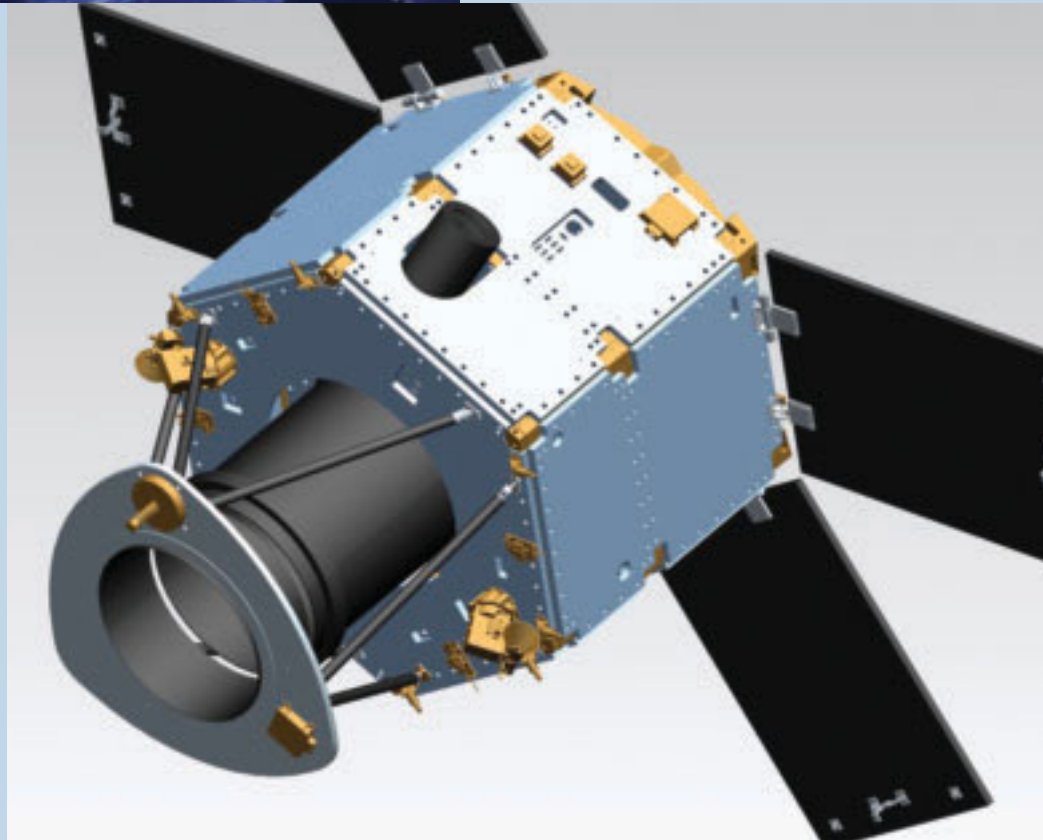
The technical improvements to the new satellite include an increase in data download speed from 30Mbps from DubaiSat-1 to 160Mbps on DubaiSat-2.

The area data acquired by the satellite will also increase from 12,000sqm per day to 17,000sqm.

"Our investment in the UAE team of engineers is the most important achievement of EIAST through our flagship satellite, DubaiSat-1, launched in 2009," said Ahmed Al Mansoori, director general, EIAST.

"These young engineers and specialists are now more confident and determined to succeed as they work towards the launch of DubaiSat-2, and this is the real achievement of our space programme."

The UAE team, along with their South Korean partners (Satrec Initiative), have designed the satellite to produce higher-quality images. It will have a panchromatic resolution of 1m and a multispectral resolution of 4m in four spectral bands (red, green, blue and near infrared). This should enhance the quality of the images for applications like environmental projects, urban planning, infrastructure, telecommunications and electricity.



Engineer Amer Al Sayegh, deputy head of the space programme department at EIAST, said the DubaiSat-2 programme has seen a significant growth in the participation of UAE engineers.

Images taken by DubaiSat-1, which was launched in July 2009, were used to study the immediate

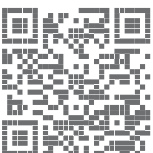
aftermath of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

The two satellites will work together and be joined in 2015 by a third EIAST satellite, DubaiSat-3, now being designed. It will be built entirely by Emirati engineers on UAE soil.

# 40



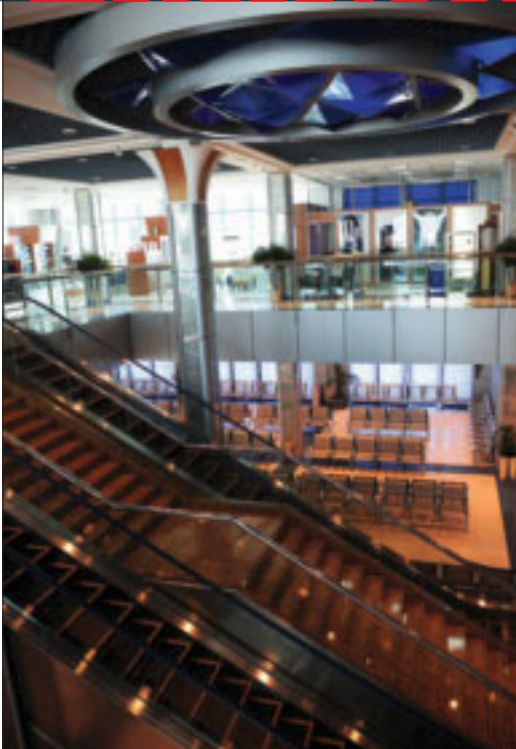
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# NORTH STARS

*The aerospace industry in the northern emirates is stepping out from being a well kept secret – and the success is starting with the airports.* **Alan Peaford** reports.

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**D**riving along the old coast road that stretches from Sharjah up to the soaring Musandam peninsula, whose rocky Omani outpost guards the entrance to the Arabian Gulf, motorists are momentarily stunned by one of the most unusual sights.

At a small airfield beside the road, a rusting Ilyushin 76 sits covered in dust, and acts as a billboard for the nearby Palma Beach Hotel. The aircraft – a former Russian Air Force transporter – had originally been sold to an African operator but was subsequently resold for scrap to the hotel, then flown in to the sandy Umm Al Quwain airstrip and left.

The airfield is now disused. The doors to the aeroclub sealed and on the apron another old relic wastes away in the sun and sand.

To many, this is what the northern emirates is about. But it couldn't be further from the truth.

Instead, the three airports – Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah – are undergoing transition and transformation to echo the investment that is going into their respective emirates.

And, as road access improves and plans are mounted for rail links, there is a general movement for people and products that suggest that a new boom is about to happen.

Of all of the airports, Sharjah is the most developed.

Indeed, the original Sharjah airport opened in 1932 for Imperial Airways as a major stopping point on the flights from Europe to Asia and was developed for use by the Royal Air Force as base until 1971, when formal ties with the UK were ended and the UAE was formed.

The runway for that old airport is now part of



Opposite: Fujairah Airport has an impressive terminal and a new building for airline offices just waiting for custom. Above: Sharjah Airport is seeing growing numbers led by Air Arabia

King Abdul Aziz Street in the city centre and the home for a splendid aviation museum.

Sharjah's new airport continues to grow today.

On a 5,000-acre site, the airport is now one of the busiest cargo facilities in the whole of the Middle East and North Africa. It is rapidly growing its passenger traffic numbers as a direct result of the region's first – and biggest – low-cost carrier, Air Arabia, having decided to set up its main base there.

The low-cost carrier took a 50% stake in the airport and led the development of a new 4,000sqm departure area with 42 check-in counters and an expansion of the main apron area.

Around the airport a freezone was developed, with aerospace companies from around the world taking advantage of the service and support from the emirate's government, as well as being part of a geographic bonus that has already been so admirably promoted by the neighbours Abu Dhabi and Dubai and their respective carriers.

The open skies policy has seen more airlines – particularly cargo – develop routes with Sharjah.

By the end of September, Sharjah had seen almost 49,000 aircraft movements in the first nine months of the year and passenger numbers had hit a record of more than 5.5 million passing through. Some 332,000 tonnes of freight had been handled at the airport.

According to the chairman of the Sharjah Airport Authority, Dr Ghanem Al Hajri, price and flexibility have been key components in the success story.

"As an international airport, operating in a global market, we appreciate the need to be flexible to meet the customers' needs.

Accordingly, our price structure is highly competitive and we offer our customers tailor-made services suited to their operations," Dr Al Hajri said. "We operate an open skies policy and, in dealing with our customers, we follow an unrestricted and flexible style, accommodating the needs and requirements of the airlines and agents to ensure the best possible operational environment."

The director general of Sharjah's department of civil aviation, Abdulwahab Mohammed Al Roomi agreed: "While the airport is extremely cost-effective with a reasonable pricing policy, we always look at providing a top quality service for all users including airlines, tour operators and passengers," he said.

"The reputation of the airport was enhanced with the opening of Sharjah Airport International Free Zone (SAIF) in September 1995 and the open skies policy has resulted in air connections to virtually every capital city in the world."

Just 30 minutes along the Emirates Highway, another airport is also going through a metamorphosis.

RAK Airport, at Ras Al Khaimah, has more than a million square metres of land. At the northern most point of the UAE there are plenty of attractions and the airport is now clearly out to grasp the opportunity.

"We have a plan to double the capacity of the airport over the next couple of years and the process has started," said Mohammed Qazi, the airport's commercial director.

With the expanding RAK Airways as the base carrier, RAK International Airport is expecting

Continued  
on Page 79

## Technology 'first' for Sharjah airport

Sharjah Internal Airport has become the first in the Middle East to introduce the internet-based EDIFly technology for operators.

The EDIFly system bypasses legacy networks for aviation messaging, giving the airlines immense savings potential, while using their existing processes.

"Through our cooperation with Lufthansa Systems we are able to serve more than 12,000 addressees, sending their messages over the web without volume charges," said Ingo Rossler chief commercial officer of Innovative Software of Luxemburg, the investor behind the EDIFly system.

"Cargolux, our launch customer, has now achieved 60% of the anticipated savings of a million dollars over three years," Rossler said.

The new technology enables standardisation and secure electronic data interchange in the aviation business covering a wide range of protocols and formats for both passenger and cargo messages such as Type B, Type X, AirIMP/cargoIMP and EDIFACT.

"This is fully transparent for all users and very user friendly to the community as all existing address are being used," Rossler said.

"Customers will be able to achieve savings of up to 75% within 12 months. We are proud to welcome Sharjah Airport as our first site in production in the Middle East."

Ali Midfa, director general for Sharjah Airport Authority, said: "We are committed to investing in modern technology driving both service and competence level and we are happy to have EDIFly on board."

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 77

to see its annual passenger numbers pass the half million mark by the end of the year.

Qazi and airport chief executive Andrew Gower joined the airport team from posts in the UK just over a year ago.

"It feels like we have known each other for ever, although we only met when we came here," Qazi said.

The two men have been working closely with the Ras Al Khaimah Department of Civil Aviation chairman Sheikh Salem bin Sultan Al Qasimi.

"We are 67% ahead of where we were this time last year. The investment into the airport is in place. Work is now under way to expand the terminal to meet the immediate need. But also it is the introduction of technology that will make a difference," Qazi said.

The airport has signed a 10-year partnership deal with ARINC that will see the introduction of common use terminal equipment (CUTE) check-in kiosks, an airport operation database (AODB) and the Arinc multichannel system that will allow passengers to check in from their hotels (see story Page 119).

The last of these is a clear ground-breaker for RAK, as it will be the first user of the technology outside the USA.

"This would be difficult to implement in a lot of places but it is where the uniqueness of RAK kicks in," said Qazi.

#### Government investment

"It is a very cohesive emirate and so, over the last ten months, Andy and I have developed relationships across various government entities. At the heart of this is the Tourism and Investment Authority, which has led the government investment in hotels, either outright or in partnership. We know the systems will be introduced because of the government ownership that makes it easier. It shows how RAK wants to be positioned as a user of advanced technology."

This will mean that passenger movement through the airport will become easier as they just use bag drop services.

A second phase of the development – slated for next year – will see a new VIP terminal being built at the southern point of the airport and the existing VIP terminal demolished to allow for an expansion of the departures terminal and a new structure roof to cover both the existing terminals and the new extension.

"We are looking at a three million capacity within five years," Qazi said, "but with the possibility of extended sausage style, in the way Dubai has, we could take that up to five million."

RAK has no aspirations to follow Dubai and become an international hub.

"We see the need to increase our position as a part of a network and hope we will see more transit passengers, but we are different to Dubai," said Qazi.

The clearer airspace is one obvious advantage.

"We are talking to airlines about RAK as a destination. We are targeting those people who



**RAK Airport's Mohamed Qazi is witnessing steady growth.**

come to RAK but fly in to Dubai. Why do that? We reckon that could be 400,000 passengers," Qazi estimated.

Russian and other Eastern European carriers are on Qazi's target list, as are German and even UK charter businesses. "There is also room for more scheduled carriers. We don't have the airspace restrictions that are affecting Sharjah, Dubai, DWC and Abu Dhabi, so there is a lot going for us here."

As part of phase one of the new development, RAK is also building a new fuel farm and will be announcing a second fuel supplier to join ARAMCO on the field.

"At the moment fuel has been limited because of storage space," Qazi said. "It has led to a great number of trucks on the road having to ferry in fuel. The new investment will lead to greater storage and make it easier."

The airport has also signed a new deal with Rakabela to develop an extended catering provision.

"Partnerships are important to us," Qazi said. "We are signing long-term arrangements. Working together will make the project succeed."

Qazi said the airport is offering generous commercial packages in the form of cash injections for marketing support for airlines using the airport.

"These packages are unknown in the market and so are very different," he said. "One operator making tech stops in other parts of Middle East saw what we were doing and described our approach as 'refreshing'. We know we have to work in partnership with the airlines and deliver a mutually beneficial result."

The airport has also begun to focus on its cargo activities. "We are working now to have a bonded cargo warehouse at the airport and this will be achieved by the year end. We are working with National Air Services (NAS) of Kuwait, and we are looking to replicate what they have in Kuwait. It is an important area."

Across the Hajja Mountains – where Jebel Jais is the highest point in the UAE at 5,700 feet – lies

Fujairah, where cargo is also a key subject.

Fujairah Airport is in the centre of the city. With an approach out over the Indian Ocean, Fujairah is the eastern most point of the UAE, and for several years has been cited as being the next big thing.

The airport has a fantastic terminal and the capability of handling up to two million passengers a year. But for now it is handling a fraction of that.

Reports suggest that the past 12 months have been the worst year for passenger numbers, due to an absence of European charter flights as the world economy hit the leisure business.

According to acting general manager Charles Hajdu, numbers are beginning to pick up.

The airport's business aviation terminal has been taken over by Swiss firm Aurora, a deal for an MRO business to move into the new hangar is close and the trade licence for Falcon Airside is imminent.

The UK company owns Falcon Aircraft Recycling and had been looking for an ideal site on which to establish a recycling facility. At the MRO show in Dubai in February a contract was signed with Fujairah.

"We will be providing a safe and efficient recycling facility at Fujairah," CEO Ian French said. "As well as protecting the environment, we will be providing a cost-effective solution for airline owners to dispose of their ageing and redundant aircraft."

#### Our ambition

"Recycling engines and other aircraft components safely in a highly regulated and technical market is what we are equipped and set up to do."

"It has been our ambition for some time and Fujairah provides the perfect location with space, skilled staff and facilities such as workshops and storage facilities within the airport as well as smelters, a sea port and good road access to the rest of the UAE."

It is these factors, along with a wave of fresh investment into the emirate, that Hajdu believes will provide a lift for both the airport and the emirate.

Billions of dollars are being pumped into Fujairah's oil, gas and shipping industries as the country's eastern seaboard assumes an increasingly strategic role.

A new overland pipeline from Abu Dhabi will allow crude oil to bypass the Strait of Hormuz through Fujairah and the expansion of the Port of Fujairah will see larger ships coming in. Shopping malls are springing up in the town centre and a new motorway has cut 45 minutes from the journey time to Dubai.

"You can sense the movement," Hajdu said. "We now have RotanaJet offering domestic services to Abu Dhabi; we think cargo numbers will increase and as more hotels are built there will be more passengers."

For the northern emirates, life in the fast lane is just beginning.

**Marcella Nethersole** takes a tour of discovery to find why route developers are eyeing the northern emirates for a piece of the UAE's tourism spend.

# Making the North magnetic for tourists

**W**hen people think of the United Arab Emirates they tend to just think of Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

We all know of the glitz Dubai has to offer. It's the party-loving emirate, with fancy hotels and restaurants, white sandy beaches and huge shopping malls.

Abu Dhabi is painted more as the 'cultural' emirate with its museums, galleries, heritage village, and the stunning Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. It offers luxury hotels, within the city and out on the islands on the Arabian Gulf, like the wildlife reserve of Sir Bani Yas Island.

Both emirates offer something for everyone. Or do they?

The United Arab Emirates is actually made up of seven emirates, and while Dubai and Abu Dhabi have lots to shout about, the other five are now starting to make a bit of noise in their own right too.

## Quieter emirates

The infrastructure across the northern emirates is under way and, while the sandy towns are getting a face-lift, already tourists and business travellers are heading out of Dubai and into these quieter emirates which beginning to offer a great selection luxury hotels, great restaurants, beaches, desert safaris, and, more importantly, a real taste of the UAE. What's more, they're more affordable.

If you're driving around the UAE you will find it very easy to get to each emirate as there is a four-lane highway connecting them all.

Just a 20-minute drive from Dubai Airport is Sharjah, the gateway to the northern emirates of Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Quwain and Ajman.

It offers lots of culture with a theatre, museums and galleries.

It also offers a more authentic shopping experience and is probably the best of all the emirates in which to buy a souvenir, particularly at the Blue Souq – a great place if you're after a cheapish Persian carpet. The Souq also becomes alive at night and is a good place to grab a tasty shawarma.

Sharjah has a few luxury hotels and resorts, such as the Radisson Blue Resort, Corniche Al



Buhaira Hotel, and the Holiday Inn Sharjah, as well cheaper hotels and apartments.

Ajman is 10km from Sharjah and is one of the smaller emirates. It is a developing business centre and a number of local and international companies are making Ajman their UAE base. It offers competitive freezone rates and has good access to the nearby Sharjah International Airport and Dubai.

## White sandy beach

For visitors, there is also a white sandy beach lined with palm trees that is well worth a visit and you can enjoy a walk along the Corniche, or to the main square with restaurants and a museum. The town of Ajman comprises the ruler's office, banks and a few companies, with the port close by. The emirate has some 30 hotels, from the Kempinski Hotel Ajman located at the end of the Corniche, to four-star hotels such as the Crown Palace, as well as budget ones.

Still on the west coast, the next emirate, Umm Al Qaiwain is the quietest of all of the emirates. No longer with an airport of its own, it has a sleepy fishing port, and agriculture also plays a

significant role in the economy. It has clean beaches and a lagoon, and bird watchers might be interested in a visit to near-by Al-Sinniyah Island, which is home to the UAE's largest Socotra cormorant, with more than 15,000 pairs making it the third largest colony in the world.

Umm Al Qaiwain really is a quiet emirate, though, with around 15 hotels, one of the best being Umm Al Qaiwain Beach Hotel.

But if you're looking for a more dynamic emirate, Ras Al Khaimah is a great choice. Known simply as RAK, this is the emirate that is still a hidden gem. With many single-language (Arabic) signposts the international business visitor or tourist really does feel as if they are in the heart of Arabia, especially when you see the roadside stalls with locals selling fruit and vegetables, carpets, and lamps.

Located furthest north in the UAE, RAK is also the most fertile of the emirates. A drive across the stunning Hajar Mountains, or even the ride to the emirate's rapidly expanding airport takes you past farms and old oasis stops.

RAK has a deep history. It was once the centre of the naval strength of the southern Gulf states.



Opposite: Fujairah has the taste of old Arabia.  
 Left: Kostas Drosos sees potential in RAK.  
 Above: The northern emirates have historic monuments.

Today, the economy relies on its port with the fishing industry, trading and agriculture – and at the heart of the emirate is its world famous ceramic business and the supply of aggregates and cement to other parts of the UAE.

This emirate is also the emerging tourist hotspot in the UAE.

It offers an unspoiled natural beauty from the dusty town to the long pristine beaches and clear blue waters, which gives it a reputation as one of the best diving spots in the Middle East. This is the emirate that you can see slowly changing – with new hotels popping up along the beach and in the town – including a massive investment from the Waldorf Astoria with a resort hotel on the seafront.

One man who knows a lot about the emirate and hotels is Dr Ali Kasabashi, general manager of Bin Majid Group, which has four hotels in RAK alone.

“The Bin Majid Group started in 1978 and its first hotel was the Majid Hotel in RAK in 1987,” said Kasabashi. “In 1998 we started the Majid Beach Resort, which today is one of the best resorts in RAK, the perfect place to enjoy the sun, sea, and sand, as well as great food.”

The Bin Majid Group also owns the Acacia

Hotel, which is government invested, and the Mangrove Hotel, which opened in March this year.

“RAK is a growing emirate that has a lot of potential, which is why we have built four hotels here,” said Kasabashi. “Our government has been investing in RAK for a good six years now; they started the Ras Al Khaimah tourism authority here just last year. Together with the government the tourism authority has a great plan and we have been promised in the near future it will be successful.”

**New hotels opening**

“There are already three or four charter operations coming to RAK and new hotels opening, including the Waldorf Astoria and The Doubletree by Hilton.”

Kasabashi said that RAK is a “virgin” emirate compared to Dubai and Abu Dhabi and offers exactly the same but on a quieter scale.

He said: “We, too, have great hotels, beaches, water sports and a water park, as well as organised desert safaris, dhow cruises and shopping. People have been recognising this

emirate as a place to visit for some years now. Our two beach hotels had 83% capacity last year and this year we expect more.

“We do well with European and Asian visitors. In terms of business visitors, we are still weak with the GCC market compared to Dubai, but we are planning to attract this market. To have four hotels in one emirate is a great advantage for us, especially as they are all quite different to the other.”

Business in RAK is already prosperous. With Oman just down the road, this emirate is seen as a gateway.

The new Mangrove Hotel makes an excellent city hotel for business travellers.

“We offer a great four-star service in this brand new hotel to fulfil the needs of business travellers, as well as tourists,” said Kostas Drosos, director of operations. “I am already making some changes within the hotel just to really step-up the interior, such as a themed swimming pool area and an authentic café. Our bedrooms were designed by Italian interior-designers, so they are modern and luxurious.”

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The UAE is known to have fantastic restaurants, which includes the Mangrove Hotel's excellent Chinese restaurant, Noodles Corner.

It's time to travel over the Hajar Mountains, which separate this final northern emirate from the rest of the country, to Fujairah.

Located on the east coast, this emirate is as equally exciting in its development as RAK, and is rich in history.

Fujairah surrounds and serves the UAE's busiest shipping port for container liners at the Sharjah owned Khor Fakkan. A massive oil bunkering and storage terminal is being developed by Fujairah city itself with both ports benefiting from being outside of the Gulf with direct access to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean and this avoiding the nearby Straits of Hormuz. This emirate welcomes the world's largest livestock shipping companies, which have set up their main holding station for sheep and cattle for the entire Arabian Peninsula. The infrastructure around the ports are now expanding as business booms.

The Fujairah Tourism Bureau has the specific task of promoting the in-bound tourism, which includes business travellers.

And it's working, as people are now flocking to the emirate to enjoy its beautiful stretch of clean



Agriculture benefits from the "green" northern emirates.

beach by the Indian Ocean and a wealth of watersports. While new hotels are being built, it's already home to some stunning hotels, including Le Meridien Al Aqah Beach, where you can enjoy one of the nine bars and restaurants. Next door is the impressive Rotana Resort and Spa.

The emirate also stakes a claim for the best diving in the UAE. The crystal waters are known for pearls, and visitors can arrange pearl diving with tour operators and are told that if they find a pearl, they can keep it.

Fujairah has a lot of cultural attractions: You could start at Fujairah Museum, which takes visitors on a journey from 3,000 years ago.

Other attractions and sites include Fujairah Fort. Located on the top of a hill this mud brick

structure that was built in 1670 is the oldest fort in the UAE.

The Fujairah Heritage Village depicts the traditional way of life for residents, with houses, farming tools, and cooking utensils. The village also contains Fujairah Fortress and other ancient buildings. Visitors can also visit Al Bidiyah Mosque, one of the oldest mosques in the UAE, and Al Hayl Castle, which was built 250 years ago and is home to the ruling family.

If you're all dried out, Fujairah is renowned for its wadis and visitors can enjoy wadi bashing.

Who said the northern emirates have nothing to shout about? Maybe next time you might think twice about staying in Dubai or Abu Dhabi and venture out into real Arabia.



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# SMALL TEAM THAT HAS A REAL HUNGER FOR A BETTER WORLD

*Sharjah Airport Free Zone is home to one aviation organisation that is making a real difference.*

**Alan Peaford** reports.

Every six seconds somewhere in the world a child dies from hunger. That is 10 every minute—600 every hour. It is more than die from AIDS, malaria and TB put together.

In a small office in the Sharjah Airport Free Zone, there is one small team that feels that pain every six seconds and is working with the aviation industry to deliver change.

The office is the UN World Food Programme (WFP) aviation branch, responsible for ensuring that aircraft used for delivering vital humanitarian aid are operated legally, safely and effectively.

Heading the operation is Captain Samir Sajat, a former Iraqi military and commercial pilot.

Having flown commercial jetliners, Antonov transporters and French helicopters, and suffered from the deprivation caused by sanctions in war-torn Iraq, Sajat is perfectly positioned to understand the aviation demands of both fixed-wing and rotor wing—and also knows what it is like to live among despair.

“The average income in Iraq when I was lucky enough to join the UN was just two dollars a month and people survived on black bread,” he recalled.

Joining the UN in 1998 saw Sajat’s salary rise to a heady \$500 a month and enabled him to support ten families.

“You only have to look at the statistics to know



**Capt. Samir Sajat: Safety is key in humanitarian operations.**

how important our role is,” Sajat said. “The aircraft used for UN humanitarian missions play an essential part in reaching the people that aid workers would otherwise be unable to serve. At any one time we have about 70 to 75 aircraft operating around the world and that is just in normal times. When we have a major international disaster, that number can increase threefold.”

The Sharjah office is responsible for the Middle East and Asian region and takes a global responsibility for aviation safety. It is one of five offices, the others being Brindesi in Italy, Accra in Ghana, Malaysia and Panama.

All came together in October when The UN held its humanitarian aviation safety conference in Jordan

under Sajat’s management. Key safety and operational issues affecting the flying activities of all of the UN’s humanitarian agencies was discussed.

“These aircraft have to go into challenging environments and often in very stressful times. It is important to know that the operations can be carried out to the highest possible standards,” Sajat said.

Secretary general Kofi Annan assigned the aviation wing of the UN humanitarian organisation to the WFP in 2004 and Sharjah stepped in to volunteer.

“Sharjah Airport and the department of Civil Aviation have been fantastic for us,” Sajat said. “They donated this office to us and that has helped us tremendously.”

The WFP team is responsible for selecting operators and brokers to meet the sudden demands for aircraft to meet the UN’s humanitarian needs. “We have to be sure they meet or exceed international operational standards,” said Sajat. “Then we carry out risk assessments and look at the operational compliance and

assess the experience of the crew and the equipment.”

As well as freight movements of humanitarian aid, Sajat’s office also manages the movement of people. “That can be aid workers going into hostile environments or evacuation of people from the scene of disasters,” Sajat said.

The core of the wing’s business is 12-70 passenger operations.

At the moment Afghanistan, Eritrea and the Sudan are among the most frequent routes.

“Maintaining high standards is vital,” Sajat said. “And when we do deliver a food drop or a take a team in, then we know we have done a small part towards our key goal – saving lives!”



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*RAK Airways has begun codeshare flights with Etihad.*

**Alan Peaford** talked to RAK's CEO, John Brayford, about the airline's strategy.

# Airline aiming to RAK up new business



**T**here have been many rumours and many doubts about RAK Airways since it was first mooted more than six years ago.

Flying Boeing 757s and ordering four 737s, the airline went through a series of CEOs faster than Etihad could invest in other airlines. Then, in 2009, RAK Airways folded.

A year later it returned with a new livery and a new management. Now John Brayford, a former British soldier and veteran of BA and Qatar Airways, is at the helm and it is no longer a sinking ship.

"I can understand why people struggled to see what we have been doing," Brayford said. "We looked like an airline worrying about transporting pilgrims or labourers. Now there is a clear, visible connection between the aspirations of Ras Al Khaimah and what RAK Airways is doing – and the codeshare with Etihad is an immense contributor."

Since the 2010 relaunch there has been a clean and controlled plan and Brayford praises the airline's board for its wisdom and support. "The plan was to operate our two A320s on a regional basis. As the core of our business nothing has changed. We have taken possession of our own aircraft rather than ACMI leasing and we will receive our third A320 for the early part of next year. That will be used to improve what we currently do, and do more of what we currently do rather than extend the network with new destinations," Brayford said.

"We need to make sure we get good connections if we are to be an attractive alternative to a more direct carrier, because the destinations around this part of the world are, by and large, very well served with very active competition from the four key carriers elsewhere in the UAE."

The airline will be adding Dammam in Saudi Arabia in the spring next year. "There is already a large amount of business there and secondly there is massive investment going into Dammam over the next few years. The third aircraft enables us to do these things," Brayford said.

#### Preliminary stages

And are there more aircraft on the way? "The lead times you need for getting aircraft are getting wider and wider, especially to get a good quality A320 from the market. We are working at the preliminary stages for winter next year," he said.

The additional aircraft will enable RAK Airways to step up frequency on its newest route, the Etihad codeshare flights to Abu Dhabi.

"If we want to attract domestic travellers to get off the road, we have to have a frequency that attracts a daily business traveller or overnight business traveller," Brayford said. "That's not going to happen overnight because we can't afford to take the risk to put double daily on now. We will be going daily in December and we expect to go double daily in spring next year."

The codeshare allows RAK Airways to offer five long-haul connections – London, Manchester, Dublin, Geneva and Bangkok – because it had not been party to previous bilateral discussions. Etihad will be selling its entire network through Abu Dhabi to Ras Al Khaimah.

"So we've not just got RAK Airways selling those five codeshare destinations, which we hope in time to increase substantially, but the deal enables Etihad to have a presence in the northern emirates that they wouldn't otherwise have and for us in return to have a presence in Abu Dhabi which, as a destination itself, will be very helpful in supporting our own RAK Airways regional network," Brayford said.

Since talks with Etihad began, the smaller airline has been getting involved in all of the bilateral discussions. "The GCAA has been very helpful," Brayford said. "The talks they arrange with respective partners overseas are set up for sectorial discussions. Countries seem willing and



**“People travelling get through in a few minutes compared to Dubai, where it can be a couple of hours if you arrive in peak of peaks.”**

**John Brayford**

prepared for this. They don't just seek rights with Dubai but also Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and now us. Countries are responding very well,” he said.

RAK Airways will soon be adding Frankfurt, Munich, New York, Chicago and Washington, followed by Belgium and several African destinations.

But the real challenge facing the airline is with a small home base – the last census showed a population of 250,000, although that has grown dramatically and could top 350,000 in next year's census – it has to reach out to a wider catchment.

“We have Umm Al Quwain, Ajman and Fujairah close by but genuinely our job is to attract passengers from Sharjah or even Dubai. I won't pretend it's easy, it's a big challenge but I think we can do it.”

So is the airline low-cost, full service value, hybrid or what?

“We have positioned ourselves not as a low-cost carrier and we provide a fully inclusive product,”

said Brayford. “There is a good meal on board, free refreshments, a 30kg baggage allowance and the added attraction at RAK airport of free parking. The small size of the airport is not a disadvantage, as it is congestion free and easy to get through in both directions.

“People travelling get through in a few minutes compared to Dubai, where it can be a couple of hours if you arrive in peak of peaks.”

But compared to the big boys to the south?

“If you travel on regional flights of two, three or four hours, then some of the hard product standards that the big carriers have, such as flat bed seats, 750 movies and so on, are really not suited for those sorts of flights, so in some respects it's a waste of your ticket money. We position ourselves as better value than full service carriers and offering more value for money than the LCCs, but at the same time providing a good standard of quality product and a high standard of service – and that is proving

very popular with our customers,” said Brayford.

In June RAK Airways went a step further to differentiate itself from the value carriers.

“We launched our business class product – RAK Premier – and decided our USP has got to be service,” Brayford said. “We can't operate with the massive investment that the big carriers have put into their premium cabins but we offer a comfortable seat, a really good quality meal, complimentary chauffeur car in the UAE, but we also offer a personal service as each customer is met at kerbside, escorted through check-in and security to the lounge and then to the aircraft. On arrival it's the same thing, as premium passengers are met at the bottom of the step and escorted through immigration to the car. And if it is their own car it is less than 100 metres from the terminal and no parking bill to pick up,” he added.

#### **Five-year plan**

Brayford said that the airline's five year plan is to “do more of what we are doing now”. He sees a potential fleet of 20-22 aircraft, with some destinations double daily and many more daily.

Load factors are currently around 73% but Brayford is aiming at the 80% mark – “That's where the routes become potentially very profitable,” he said.

On time performance is between 80% and 90%. “But with only two aircraft, if one is late we lose 50% of our rating,” he said. Even so, the airline is looking carefully at some timings, particularly with the evening flight to Calicut, which coincides with a peak of ATC problems every day.

It is this attention to detail and consistent improvement that is making people sit up and take notice of RAK Airways.

“Certainly the evidence we have so far is that, even operating on very thin frequencies of two or three flights a week, we are able to attract a significant number of customers who are able to get a flight where they don't pay for anything after they have bought ticket; who like being well looked after on the aircraft, and who like the simple arrival or transfer at RAK airport. We are working closely with RAK airport's management team as we want to keep that advantage as we go forward,” Brayford concluded.

New facilities and clear approaches for Fujairah Aviation Academy.

Bottom Left:  
Training in the simulator.

Bottom right:  
Captain Bilal Pasha



Alan Peaford visits the fast-growing Fujairah Aviation Academy and discovers why it enjoys one clear advantage.

# Academy in a class of its own



Fujairah's position on the easterly side of the Hajar Mountains gives it a clear advantage over the other emirates – with clear being the operative word.

Apart from the worst of the summer days, the breezes from the Indian Ocean seem to keep the humidity at bay and the dust haze that blights the major cities of Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi is a rarity.

In other words, it is perfect flying conditions.

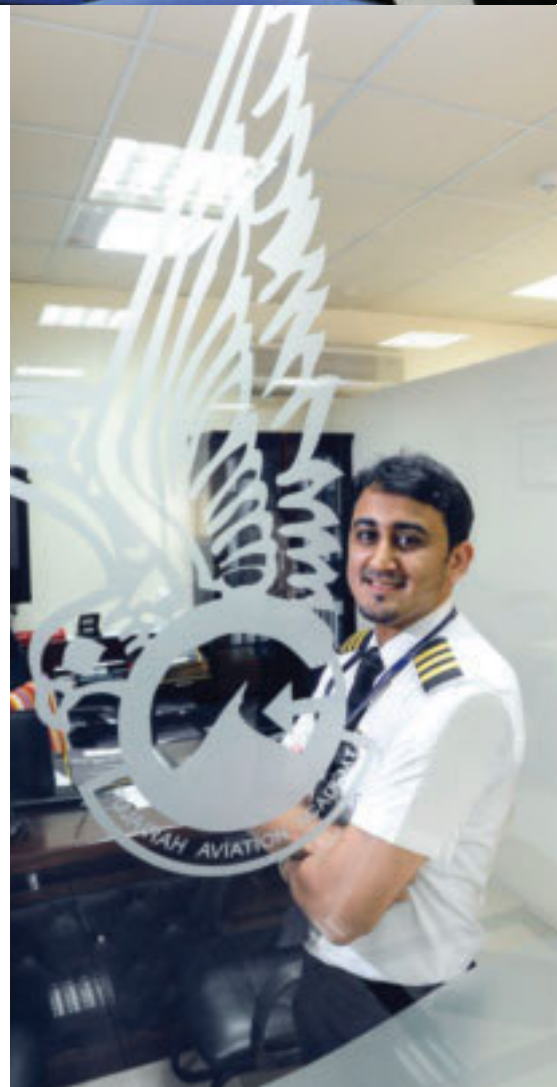
And that is good news for the Fujairah Aviation Academy (FUJAA) based at Fujairah's international airport.

Although currently in a collection of temporary structures at the corner of the main terminal building, FUJAA is preparing to move to the new office building built by the airport authority to house airline representatives. The academy is taking a floor to include 20 large classrooms to meet the growing demand for its services.

"This is a great place to fly," said Capt Bilal Pasha, who heads the marketing function for the academy as well as being a senior instructor.

"I came here myself to learn," he added. "I had begun learning in Dubai but even then

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 86

the airport was getting busy and I decided it was worth driving here to do my PPL and then my ATPL. With the new road it is just 50 minutes from Dubai and you are almost certainly going to get decent weather and no hold ups for taxi clearances.”

The academy itself – formerly known as Fujairah Aviation Centre – was originally founded in 1986 under the patronage of HH Sheikh Saleh Mohammed Hamad Al Sharqi, brother to the ruler of the emirate.

As one of the school’s first students and still a keen pilot himself, Sheikh Saleh promotes and supports interest and knowledge of the aviation industry to aspiring pilots.

All of the FUJAA courses are approved by the UAE GCAA and, upon successful completion, result in the issue of a UAE licence. As a member of ICAO, licences issued by the UAE are convertible to the licences of other ICAO states, subject to their civil aviation regulations.

More recently the academy has expanded, opening an aviation maintenance and engineering college. It is planning to add a new hangar, which will include workshops and enable the aspiring engineers to get real experience with the FUJAA fleet of two Diamond DA42 twinstars, three of the

single-engine Diamond DA40s, two Cessna 172s fitted with Garmin G1000 glass cockpits, and four S-model C172s with the traditional cockpits.

The student body has now passed the 200 mark. More than a quarter have come from Nigeria – both for pilot training and engineering; other students are from the UAE’s armed forces, where they are undergoing civil conversions. Yet more are from Dubai or elsewhere in the region, learning over time, with a contingent from the Indian sub continent, who are keen on careers in aviation.

**Commercial movements**

“The fact that Fujairah doesn’t yet have a lot of commercial movements is good for us,” Pasha said. “There is no waiting for taxi clearance, no holding or orbiting. We have unrestricted take-offs and landings and the 12,300ft runway is so long we can do three touch-and-go manoeuvres in a single pass.”

With the training area located only five minutes flight time after take-off, students are quickly working rather than wasting valuable time waiting to get off the ground. The airfield is equipped with NDB/VOR/DME/ILS and radar navigation facilities. “The tower here is really good and we have air traffic control, meteorological and flight

briefing available 24 hours a day,” Pasha said.

As part of a drive to encourage more Emiratis to take up aviation, the academy is offering special discounts.

It is also offering a distance learning course with a UK partner to cater for those who wish to carry on working while training and it also offers a full English language proficiency (ELP) training, which is now mandatory for pilots.

But it is not all rosy.

Air space in the UAE is restricted because of the huge growth of commercial air traffic and military and that has led to greater demands on the nation’s airfields.

“Umm al Quwain is closed now, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are effectively closed to general aviation or training flights, as is Al Bateen. This creates problems for students having to fly their qualifying cross-country flights,” Pasha said. “At the moment we can use Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah and can request slots at Al Ain, but it is getting harder.”

Like many, Pasha believes there should be a greater understanding of the value of training for the future of air transport. “These are tomorrow’s pilots,” he said. “ATC needs to recognise students and work with them. The industry needs them.”

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Light sport aircraft are on offer at Al Jazeera from the team, Captains Amith Pillai, Afaq Khan, Kirti Rana and Dinesh Prabhu.

# Secrets of the Jaz club

**A** bright yellow aircraft barely 500 feet high turns above from the beachfront properties and begins a steady descent into what looks, from the Ras Al Khaimah to Umm al Quwain highway, like an industrial estate, typical of the facilities springing up in the developing industrial landscape of the UAE's most northern emirate.

Further investigation and a short drive along a semi-paved road brings the remarkable site of a 500m, or so, runway and the signs promoting the Jazeera Flying Club.

Beside the apron and a large hangar is the flying club's clubhouse.

Inside there is memorabilia, aviation magazines, comfortable seating, light refreshments and Captain Amith Pillai, flight instructor and the general manager of the UAE's best kept aviation secret.

"We fly microlights or light sport aircraft from here and we have 270 members," said Pillai. "People who want to fly come here from Dubai or the other emirates. We have about 70 active pilots and it can get quite busy at weekends with people

*Alan Peaford discovers a small oasis where the passion and enjoyment of pure leisure flying is flourishing in the northern tip of the UAE.*

learning to fly, or those with their own aircraft who just want to go and enjoy the perfect conditions."

The club was originally formed by Sheikh Omar bin Saqr Al Qassimi, the brother of Ras Al Khaimah's ruler Sheikh Saud and a real general aviation enthusiast – as well as being the chairman of RAK Airways.

The club began at an airfield close to the royal palace but was granted some land away from the main city.

It is still strongly supported by RAK's

leadership. Chairman of the RAK department of civil aviation Sheikh Salem bin Sultan Al Qassimi said he believed it was essential that the joy of flight be experienced by Emiratis if the UAE is to further develop its strategy for aerospace.

"Airspace is very restricted in the UAE, as you would expect with the growth of the airports and the airlines, but we felt it important to find some space for Jazeera to enable people to experience flight.

"There are people from the UAE and internationally who visit the club and get to fly. The club has designated training areas and also can fly along the beautiful coastline of RAK," Sheikh Salem said.

The club has a chief flying instructor, Capt Afaq Ahmed Khan, and three other instructors – Capt Pillai, Capt Kirti Rana and Capt Dinesh Prabhu.

Newcomers to the club – or even tourists – get an introduction flight which gives them a bird's eye view of the emirate and a chance to handle one of the club's six aircraft, three Aeroprakt 22s,

Continued  
on Page 90



Kirti Rani now has logged 1800 flying hours.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 89

and an Aeroprakt FK9 from Ukraine or two Jetfoxes from Italy. The airfield is also home to the RAK Helijet service.

“The aircraft are great fun to fly. People come here and go through the whole training process to achieve their microlight pilot licence,” said Pillai. It takes a minimum of 20 hours of ground school and 25 hours of flying to get to the level demanded by the GCAA to carry out a skills test. Membership of the club is \$275 a year, with flying costs around \$135 an hour for members.

Indian-born flying instructor Kirti Rana qualified with a commercial pilot’s licence in the Philippines and joined the Jazeera club in 2011. She now has more than 1,800 hours under her belt and said how much she loved flying the light aircraft and introducing people to the joy of flight.

“It is always great to see their reaction,” she said.

Although the club is restricted to a 60km stretch of RAK’s coastline Pillai, who has been there eight years after qualifying as a commercial pilot in Moscow, believes that is plenty of space to get a feel for leisure flight.

“We do go further afield sometimes,” he said. “We get special permissions to cross the restricted airspace to take part in air shows in places like Abu Dhabi or Qatar.”



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# Volga-Dnepr hangar to open at Sharjah

**W**ork is underway at Sharjah Airport on a large new hangar that will soon be providing state-of-the-art MRO services for freighters and passenger airlines.

The hangar – owned by Russian cargo specialist Volga-Dnepr – should be fully operational by January 2013. It will be operated by Volga-Dnepr Gulf, which will be offering services to third parties for both Russian and Western-built aircraft.

Volga-Dnepr is a familiar sight at Sharjah, not just for its liveried aircraft so often seen on the ramp but also through its operation in the Emirate.

The 20,000sqm hangar is located in a future heart of the multifunctional MRO, which will service Western and Russian aircraft. The facility is equipped with the latest air conditioning and ventilation systems as well as a certified fire protection system. In addition, the new MRO base will provide a wide range of additional services – repair of wheels and brakes, batteries, structure repairs etc – and there is extensive space for storage.



“We will be offering a range of services to cargo operators,” said managing director Victor Sherin. “The Sharjah Airport Free Zone is well known as a vast cargo centre for the whole Middle East region and this investment will allow flight operators to effectively solve any maintenance related issues that arise during the operations, from line maintenance to heavy checks.”

The hangar has capacity to maintain up to six narrow-body aircrafts or two 747s at the same time. A wide spectrum of types, such as Boeing

737-Classic, 737-NG, 747-200/300/400, AN-124, AN-74 and IL-76, are expected to be among the users.

Volga-Dnepr Gulf was established in Sharjah in 1996 with core activities including maintenance and repair services, supply of rotables, components, consumables and expendables, as well as the sale of aeronautic products and petroleum, oils and lubricants (POL) applicable to a wide range of aircraft. The new hangar complex will step this up a gear.

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Mr. Biju Pillai: 00971 5048 29867

Hawker Beechcraft





Aerostar will be combining its traditional engine MRO activities alongside cabin crew training at its Sharjah facilities.

# Aerostar shines its light in many different directions

*Sharjah is the base for the rapidly expanding Aerostar business and, as Marcella Nethersole finds out, the MRO specialist is branching out into new areas.*

November is a month that Aerostar has been looking forward to as it begins its training services with launch customer Air Arabia on its live mock-up of an A320.

“What we did was dismantle an A320, take the top fuselage and ship it to Ras Al Khaimah and have it refurbished by Spatial Composites to make it a live mock-up training aircraft where all the panels are the same,” said Ajay Chaudhary, general manager.

“Training starts in November with Air Arabia, so we’re just waiting for delivery from Spatial Composites.”

Aerostar will provide the A320 training aircraft, along with classrooms and equipment.

“It’s not just an emergency evacuation trainer that we provide, it’s also a galley trainer for the crew. So any airline that wants service training can also come to us,” explained Chaudhary.

Air Arabia will be providing instructors for its training crew but Chaudhary said Aerostar is looking at providing its own instructors one day as it plans to expand with a B737-NG.

He added: “Providing instructors is down to the

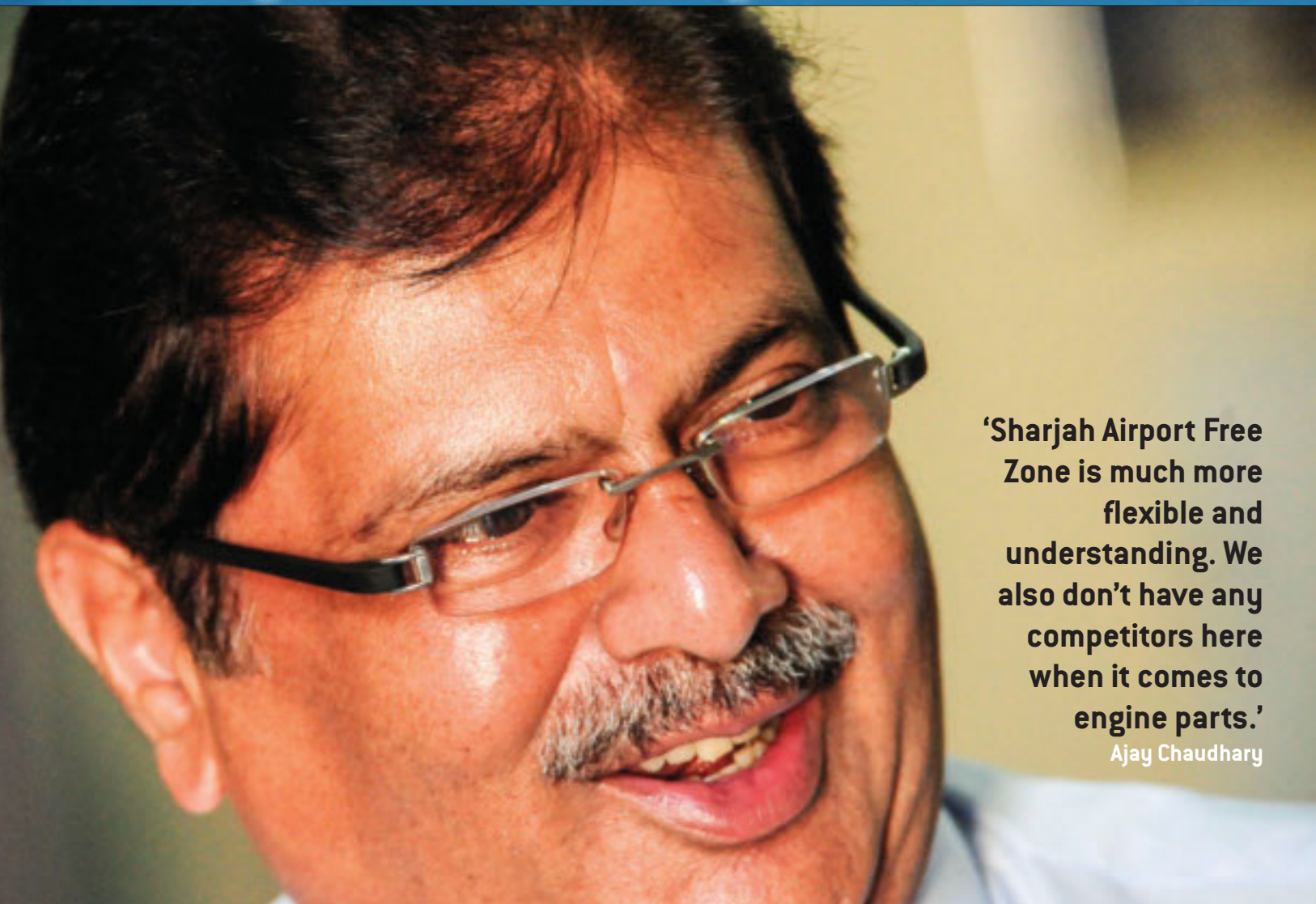
civil aviation authority. However, as our training sector grows it is something we need to think about. We are already receiving interest from RAK Airways about future training as it, too, uses a fleet of A320s, as does Indigo from India which has 60 A320s.

“The A320 is smaller and airlines don’t necessarily have this type of aircraft to train on. Qatar Airways and Etihad have also said they would like to come and see the trainer when it arrives. While many operators have their own wide-body trainers, I think we will also look at getting one.”

Aerostar’s training actually has a unique angle, in that it is also providing a full A320 lavatory mock-up fire trainer.

“Fire training is a big part of cabin crew requirement that is often overlooked in terms of other training facilities providing the equipment,” said Chaudhary. “So what we have done is provide a full lavatory trainer where a live flame comes out of the toilet and the training crew has to extinguish it with a fire extinguisher.”

But what really makes Aerostar stand out from



**‘Sharjah Airport Free Zone is much more flexible and understanding. We also don’t have any competitors here when it comes to engine parts.’**

**Ajay Chaudhary**

other training companies is the fact that it never was one.

The company started up in 2005 as an asset management organisation buying, selling and leasing aircraft engines.

“Our tie up with Air India engine shop, which started in 2009, gave us the impetus to market the engine shop capabilities to customers in the Middle East and Africa,” said Chaudhary.

“We use Air India’s facility in Mumbai, where it has a fully-fledged EASA- and FAA-approved repair shop to repair overhaul and service certain types of engine as well as building its engines. In turn, we give Air India our business, and we get its brand.

“We will source business, not just for ourselves but also for Air India, in the entire Middle East, as that is our jurisdiction.

“For our own engines, I can bring them from around the world, no problem.”

Aerostar also has a successful tie-up with TG engine shop for engine repair and overhaul and aircraft lease, and the UAE for engine repair and overhaul, as well as an agreement with KLM/Air

France to repair engines in Paris, and with Evergreen Aircraft Technologies in Taiwan.

“In 2006 and 2007 we were working on a lot of the classic engines – 40 or 50 in a year. These days there is an advance in technology with the new generation aircraft so the engines can be more trouble free and the volume comes down, although in terms of business, the cash goes up,” explained Chaudhary.

#### **No space**

Engine customers include TAM Brazil, USA airlines, Aero Union in Mexico, and Middle East Airlines.

The company had originally applied to Dubai Airport Free Zone as a location, but it was told there was no space there.

“As it happens, that worked well for us as Sharjah Airport Free Zone is much more flexible and understanding,” said Chaudhary. “We also don’t have any competitors here when it come to engine parts, plus we’re logistically very well placed and have plenty of room for our two warehouses.”

Today, 70% of the business is still dedicated to the MRO side, and 20% is now focused on training. So what of the other 10%?

“Yes, we are quite busy here,” laughed Chaudhary. “The other 10% is with aircraft acquisitions. We have bought a lot of planes that we have dismantled to get access to a huge inventory of parts to support smaller airlines.

“Older generation aircraft are no longer in production, so parts are harder to get. We recognised this in 2005, so we started purchasing retired aircraft that airlines no longer needed or wanted, or buying from companies which owned them and no longer had use for them due to finances.”

The company has acquired 14 aircraft to date.

“The last one we dismantled was an Air France A320 in November 2011, which gave us access to a whole load of inventory. With that, we were able to support a lot of airlines, including the OEM manufacturer Thales.”

So, it looks highly likely that Aerostar’s next purchase will be of a B737-NG for its new venture in training.

# RUSSIAN IN A RUSH

AviaHelp proves it is the real deal with its just-in-time business

*The site of Russian fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters at Sharjah Airport is not unusual – so no wonder there is one company there to provide valuable support.*

**Marcella Nethersole**  
*reports.*

**F**ormed in 1997 with its head office in Moscow, AviaHelp was established to act as a provider of spare parts and service solutions for all modifications of Russian helicopters.

Today, the company also has a small office in Sharjah. But, while the office is small, the business is big, as regional representative Andrey Ulyashin explained.

“We’re based in Sharjah for the simple reason it is cheaper than Dubai or Abu Dhabi. We have an excellent track record in supplying spare parts for the Russian-built MI-17, MI-8, MI-171 and MI-172 helicopters and aircraft like the IL-76 from our own stock here in Sharjah, and we do this within the designated time period and close to budget.”

The sales office and warehouse is based in the SAIF-Zone free trade area and offers helicopter operators some key benefits.

“We have current spare part stocks in demand in SAIF-Zone with the possibility of urgent delivery from Moscow. We have almost 15 years’ experience in aircraft and helicopter spare parts supply, and strong business contacts with helicopter original equipment manufacturers,” said Ulyashin. “We are a just-in-time business, so we turn things around very quickly.”

The warehouse stock-list includes helicopter components and units for hydraulics, electromechanical, pneumatic systems, standard spare parts, and instruments.

Ulyashin said the biggest problem for the company is making sure the parts are authentic and not fake, which is a common problem for many spare parts providers.

“The prime concern of AviaHelp is to supply authentic spare parts to all our customers,” said Ulyashin. “But as a company, we work closely with the OEM and have an agreement with them, and the OEM certifies every spare part it produces. Even if we buy the overhaul spare parts we will always check it first with the OEM for authenticity. The OEM provides a delivery time and manufacturing price for the parts, so when it’s not available in stock in the UAE or Russia we turn to them for help.

“Authenticity is a primary issue for Russian Helicopters. A lot of countries, particularly African ones, look for cheap spare parts and don’t care about the history of the part – they just care about the price. That just isn’t an option for us as safety is paramount. It’s as simple as this; if it’s ok we sell it, if not, we don’t.”

The company also provides necessary spares for Western-built aircraft and their ground support, the most recent being Airbus and Boeing aircraft.

## Boeing and Airbus

“We have recently started the supply of spare parts for Boeing and Airbus but Russian airlines are our target. In Russia you can find around 40 airlines operating different types of aircraft,” said Ulyashin.

“We are doing some work on the B737. We have EASA repair station certification but our capability list isn’t big. If we do elements on an aircraft, we do the air-con system and generator parts – so quite small.”

The company also does ground support equipment, mainly Russian made. These include; GPUs, ground power units, maintenance ladders, towing-bars, equipment for checking systems.

Ulyashin said the next step for the company is to look outside the Russian market.

“We have a sister company in the US searching for the spare parts to send to Russia,” said Ulyashin. “We will also focus on Africa.

“Africa has a lot of countries that have been using Russian helicopters since the 1970s. Particular helicopters were designed for that particular region,” he explained. “We don’t have a facility out there at the moment as the infrastructure isn’t developed enough but we hope to search for the operators of Russian helicopters in the African region. Most of the Russian helicopters are in Sudan, Egypt, Algeria, Djibouti, and Congo. Africa is a closed continent – it’s quite hard communicating due to language barriers, but it is a region we are keeping an eye on.”



**Andrey Ulyashin: Help at hand.**





Samir Gupta: support for business aviation across the region.

## Arrow on target for continued success

**A**rrow Aviation began as a spare parts dealer in Kolkata, India, back in 2001. The company soon grew and opened regional offices in Delhi and Mumbai.

By 2007 the company was looking beyond India and president Samir Gupta could see prospects in the Middle East.

"We could see potential and we opened up in Sharjah. We had proven our expertise and knew we could transfer those skills here," he said.

The Sharjah business is based in the Sharjah Airport Freezone, and CEO Partha Sarathi takes up the story. "We have been able to grow our warehouse here and achieve approval from the GCAA – that is really important. We also got the distributorship for parts for Hawker Beechcraft and that has enabled us to start selling in the UAE and work with the different emirates."

The growth in business aviation has made an impact for Arrow.

"Being a part of a world hub is important. I believe Dubai is now a bigger hub and a bigger destination than Singapore," Gupta said. "That means its importance for business and corporate aviation has grown too."

Arrow was made an authorised distributor for all Hawker Beechcraft parts across the Indian sub-continent, the Middle East and north Africa.

"Africa has great potential as well. I can see us using our experience in Sharjah to step into Africa. Things are happening there like they were here just a few years ago," said Gupta.

*As business aviation manufacturer Hawker Beechcraft has grown its presence in the Middle East area, one Indian-headquartered business has also become part of the success story. Alan Peaford reports.*

The world's best selling turboprop is the Hawker Beechcraft King Air and with the type active in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Oman, Arrow is growing its reach across the region.

Hawker has recently added critical Premier 1 and Hawker 4000 parts to be held by Arrow for AOG events. And, as Arrow's reputation grows in the region, it is looking at other representations from the business aviation sector.

It has become sole distributors of David Clark aviation headsets in India and will be looking to extend this. The company also represents Allied International, the biggest supplier of Tron Air ground support equipment and Jet Porter tugs. "We work with manufacturers and distributors around the world to support our customers by providing best solutions in normal as well as AOG situations," Gupta said.

"We have professionals with vast experience in selling avionics instruments, airframes, rotables, and accessories, specialty chemicals and lubricants for all types of aircraft and helicopters."

Sarathi said that Arrow's business portfolio is balanced between government and business aviation. "This mixed portfolio means we are covered in a downturn," he explained. "The government work is always consistent and nothing to do with the business environment so the portfolio balances out."

Gupta said Arrow has no regrets at selecting Sharjah as a base rather than Dubai.

"We are just ten minutes from the Dubai Airport Free Zone and terminal two. Yet employment costs and overheads are lower in Sharjah. There is also more space available.

"We are looking at expanding and extending by looking at other manufacturers. Because of the freedom that is enjoyed in Sharjah, this becomes much easier to do and the airport, the free zone and the government are very supportive.

"We have a niche in the market and having the GCAA approvals makes it better for us to do business from here."

The team of seven work around the clock. They monitor parts usage and particularly the common parts that are used across the sector. With several million dollars of stock they continue to rotate. "We hope to be achieving an annual \$40million in sales from here in the next five years," Gupta said.

And he can already see those signs of business aviation recovery. "I see the growth coming from Africa, while Saudi Arabia is also a big market. Our traditional Indian market is growing and we see people moving from smaller to bigger aircraft."

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From the heart of Ajman Excel is supplying airports and airlines across the Gulf.



## EXCEL WELDING A NICHE BUSINESS IN AJMAN

**A**jman is the smallest of the emirates that make up the UAE. The city of Ajman is close to Sharjah International Airport and the growing offices and busy streets are an indicator of how the emirate is using its close proximity to its Dubai and Sharjah neighbours to its best advantage.

On the outskirts of the city and close to the major Emirates Highway, there lie a number of industrial areas.

From furniture makers to automotive repair stations, this is the industrial heartland of the UAE. Rows of power cables from the emirate's power station hang overhead the industrial zone and there is a constant background noise of hammering and hissing and a buzz as thousands of workers go about their daily business.

In the heart of the zone there is one company making great strides in one of the least-served industries – aerospace manufacturing.

A decade or two ago, while Etihad and Qatar Airways were not even thought of and Emirates was barely heard of, there was hardly any support at all. Even an MRO facility was a rarity.

But today, with the busiest international hubs in the world, a growing MRO network and rapidly expanding airlines, there is a clear need for a local provision of equipment and services.

*Manufacturing for the aerospace industry is still relatively rare in the Middle East – but Alan Peaford finds one company that has created a business to support the local airlines and airports.*

And Excel Industries in Ajman is happy to provide it.

Back in May, Emirates contracted the fabrication business to develop and construct a multi-aircraft system for the airline's hangar E. This was a follow-up to the four docking systems already in place in four of Emirates' eight hangars built by the Ajman company.

Excel operates with its German partner, Gunzburger Steigtechnik, and has worked with Emirates for the past 15 years. It won the latest contract against other international bids.

At the fabrication yard at the rear of the Ajman facility, Excel was working hard to build the fuselage, tail and infill docks for the airline.

"The increase in the heavy maintenance plan of the Emirates fleet necessitates the requirement to expand our facility to meet our future maintenance capability requirement," explained Adel Al Redha, executive vice-president of Emirates engineering and operations.

"Working with reliable, professional organisations in the UAE like Excel provides us with the confidence required to support our need to the timeframe and standard required."

Excel also has offices in Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Hamriya Free Zone and Abu Dhabi, as well as having a branch operating in North America.

The facility covers more than 700,000sqft and boasts a highly experienced workforce of more than 800.

For some time Excel has been involved in the design, engineering and construction of major projects, including airports, oil and gas projects, and civil construction.

With the growth in numbers passing through the region, the company has seen a growing demand for its ground support equipment, such as baggage dollies and trucks.

As well as Emirates, other customers include DNATA in Dubai, Air Arabia in Sharjah and JorAMCo in Jordan.

*Dubai is a global hub for the flight support industry in the UAE but Marcella Nethersole meets one company doing rather well in the northern emirates instead.*

# The Sultan of wing...

## Why RAK is just right for RamJet

Issam Sultan, the general manager of RamJet Aviation Support, has always been confident about his service company being based in Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) – away from the big guns of Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

“We started off nearly a decade ago as a small business in a remote corner of the Middle East. We have come a long way since our humble beginnings, but we’re happy being in Ras Al Khaimah,” said Sultan.

“Being a relatively small company, we try and keep our costs down to a certain limit. There is no need to interact with our clients face-to-face, so actually we could run the company from anywhere, but the infrastructure in RAK is more or less the same as Dubai. It has the same telecommunications and the same banking sectors, but the cost of living is much cheaper than Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and as we reduce our costs we in turn pass on the saving to our customers, so why would we want to be in any other emirate?”

“We were one of the first to set up shop in the UAE, and business is great for us here.”

### Hassle-free service

RamJet Aviation Support takes care of the needs of operators, from ground handling, to permits, and charter services.

“We offer our clients an easy and hassle-free service,” explained Sultan. “Our services extend from pre-flight to post-landing scenarios. Most operators will find services of a ground handling agent essential.

“We coordinate with various agencies around the world well in advance to ensure a speedy clearance of passengers, crew and baggage, as well as provide various services and equipment to take care of the aircraft. For established clients, we also offer credit handling.”

RamJet supports long and short flight permits for the Middle East region, as well as Africa and the Far East.

“Permits can be the biggest hurdle operators face, but it’s not a problem for us thanks to our relationship with the civil aviation authority,” said Sultan. “If our client requires support in Africa with permits and ground handling we can coordinate that. We’re basically an extension to their flight centre.”

Sultan likes to keep his private clients exactly that way... private.



“We have a lot of clients from private backgrounds and it stays private,” he said. “Actually, another great reason for us to be located in Ras Al Khaimah is that it helps keep our clients low-profile, unlike Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah.”

RamJet also offers air charter passenger services, air charter cargo service and ACMI leasing as well as extending its services to providing catering and organising accommodation.

“We have strong connections to the most established airline caterers and can shoulder the responsibility of offloading used food and beverage and on-loading fresh food and beverage based on the clients’ budget and dietary preferences,” said Sultan.

“And for people needing accommodation booking, we can arrange a hotel for clients and crew from a wide range of hotels and resorts within budget.”

### Strong relationships

RamJet has strong relationships with a number of suppliers, as well as having contracts with all the major airports in the UAE and the region in countries including; Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait – as well as extending out to India and Pakistan.

“If an airport is operating a flight and they need help, they call us and we will arrange everything for them,” said Sultan. “We don’t work closely with one particular airport, we are spread all over. I would say 80% of the business we get is outside of the UAE.

“But we do expect to get more business at RAK airport as we get more leads.

“There is a lot of marketing by the RAK Government to show it as a tourist destination. Since early this year, we are getting more and more enquiries within the emirate.

“RAK is a growing emirate with a lot of potential. In the last few years we have seen the presence of charter operators seeking to operate more flights in to RAK Airport as a tourist destination. And I see more SMEs prospering here.”

Sultan added: “To do a tech stop you’re better off here than many of the other emirates. It’s easy to obtain, you land and your crew are in and out, unlike Dubai for instance, where people are sat taxiing for half an hour to park their aircraft.”

*A new fixed base operation (FBO) is to open its doors at Sharjah Airport in January.*

**Alan Peaford** *talks to Gama Aviation about its reasons behind the move into FBO management.*

It's a typical question for a business aviation flight support operator: What is the fastest way for me to get to a business meeting in downtown Dubai?

The answer might be a surprise. Go via Sharjah.

But that is the premise that has seen UK-headquartered business aviation group Gama tie up with Sharjah International Airport to invest in a new FBO facility at the airport.

For managing director of Gama Aviation in the Middle East, Dave Edwards, it is a question of simple mathematics.

"We reckon that from landing to chocks-on time of just six minutes and an arrival process that is seamless and effortless, customers arriving at Sharjah can be in downtown Dubai in just 20 minutes. We are seeing it take 40 minutes to offload at Dubai International, so we know we are quicker," Edwards explained.

Sharjah International Airport's ease of access makes it one of the most efficient and easy to use airports in the region and Gama believes the message is getting out.

#### Numbers increasing

"For us it is about moving people through the airport in the shortest possible time. We are seeing numbers increasing, and picking up lots of referral business. We haven't been promoting or advertising yet as we don't want to outrun ourselves. We are looking for sustained development but the numbers are up. From a standing start in January there were about 30 movements. We are now doing around 140. It is happening."

Edwards has an office in the Dubai Airport Free Zone and a number of clients based in Dubai. "I get them to meet in our sales office and we drive from there to here in 15 minutes; they are always surprised that it is as quick as it is. It is further away than the FBOs at Dubai Airport but you are in the air quicker. If you can make the journey quicker it is what business aviation all about."

Edwards has nothing but praise for the support of Sharjah Airport. "That support is key to it all. If they didn't want it to succeed it wouldn't. They are so much behind it," he said.

With a team of 27 Emiratis working as liaison specialists, known as PROs, business jet customers can send their passports and baggage



## Gama raises the

links to Sharjah but the reality is that it has changed and is getting even better. The roadworks on the main highway will be finished next year and it will be even smoother. If you believe the rumours, as the summer season starts then there will be a push towards moving business aviation from Dubai International to Dubai World Central (DWC).

"We are compliant with GCAA guidelines," said Jeremy Mitchell who joined Gama to head the FBO team from Sharjah Aviation Services. "We advance clear the passports and take the baggage."

"But, even if the customer comes with extra baggage, the screening is close to where we operate and within five minutes the screening can be complete. Meanwhile, the passenger clears immigration and is driven to the aircraft. It is all very quick."

#### Wonderful job

Again, Edwards believes they beat Dubai on speed. "On the ramp at Dubai, the FBO will have to drive to the stand where the business jets are being parked – and that is wherever there is space. I am not knocking Dubai Airport. Emirates has done a wonderful job and as an airport do you want an A380 or a Gulfstream? Well, you would want the A380 every time."

"There is still a stigma about the transport

links to Sharjah but the reality is that it has changed and is getting even better. The roadworks on the main highway will be finished next year and it will be even smoother. If you believe the rumours, as the summer season starts then there will be a push towards moving business aviation from Dubai International to Dubai World Central (DWC).

"I look at where we take most of our customers – the Dubai International Financial Centre and the E – it is not to the marina or the Palm. DWC will have great facilities and great FBOs when they are built, but it is 45 minutes to an hour to get to the business centre. If I can do it in 17 minutes, then it is a good sales prospect."

It was January when Gama signed the deal with Sharjah to have exclusive handling of executive aviation at the airport. This was Gama's first expansion into FBO management in the MENA region, although the company has been operating at Sharjah since 2004.

Gama Aviation had been instrumental in expanding the airport's business aviation activity with a number of its UAE-managed fleet based there.



Dave Edwards and  
(left) Jeremy  
Mitchell:  
confident about  
Gama's positioning  
at Sharjah.

# bar for smooth operations

Initially Gama has been using the royal majlis at the airport as its terminal but Edwards and Mitchell are hopeful that the new building will be ready by January 2013 – if not before.

In early October the site was still a lawn between the majlis and the civil aviation authority offices.

“We had originally looked at building a new FBO at the far end of the airport with hangars alongside. But we realised we might lose our great advantage of the quick passage through,” said Edwards. “We had to look again and came up with a modular building that will have a three-year lifespan but will enable us to demonstrate our capability.”

The challenge of finding hangarage was solved when AVE.com, a Kyrgyzstani-owned charter business, collapsed and its hangar – next door to Gama’s existing MRO hangar – became available.

“This was ideal for us. It meant we could move right in and begin operations.”

In August, Gama Support Services was awarded CGAA part 145 for the maintenance of Bombardier Challenger 601, 604 and 605s as well as the King Air 200, which allowed it to expand

services at the Sharjah base by providing line maintenance. Gama Aviation had already become one of the first UAE-based business jet operators to achieve CAR Part M maintenance management approval.

“We were delighted that the GCAA recognised Gama’s commitment to investing, supporting and growing business aviation services in the region,” Edwards said. “I know our customers will appreciate the additional maintenance and management services we have been approved to provide.”

#### Third-party services

But there are no immediate moves towards offering third-party services, although the company is hopeful of getting EASA approvals too. “We need to be providing maintenance services for our managed fleet,” Edwards said.

“We don’t want to rely on third parties for dispatch reliability. So, primarily, the main role is to look after our aircraft.

“We also have a Legacy in our fleet now and hope to have Part 145 authorisation by the end of the year for that too.”

Gama has added two more aircraft to its managed fleet in the region during this year. “That is something of a result,” Edwards said. “During the past year hardly any new aircraft have come into the region, so any movement has been between operators. Therefore, taking two is pleasing.

“The charter business has been flat too. We haven’t seen any of the traditional spikes such as Ramadan or Eid. The unsettled nature of the region has been the biggest problem. Outside of the seasonal spikes nearly all of the business travel is through the Middle East region. That has slowed right down with the events in Lebanon and Syria.”

The economy has not helped either but Edwards believes that, once a new US president is elected, things will change.

“The economy always seems to suffer when there is a US election. When the global economy suffers so does business aviation. After the election is over hopefully things will pick up again.”

And when they do, Sharjah’s new FBO will be there to greet them.



# Aurora spots a new dawn rising in Fujairah

**A**urora Aviation has high hopes for its new FBO in one of the UAE's quietest emirates.

The Swiss aviation services company has signed a memorandum of understanding with Fujairah International Airport to take over its executive aviation terminal and ground handling services.

Ammar Kutait, CEO of Aurora Aviation, said despite being small, Fujairah had "huge potential" to attract business jet operators looking for alternative lower-cost parking and other services than from busier airports in the region such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai or Jeddah.

"In much of the Middle East, parking is scarce and expensive. We can offer the ability to, for example, drop a VVIP passenger in Dubai and then park at Fujairah for three days before returning to pick him up," he said. "Availability of fuel also makes Fujairah attractive as a technical stop."

## Executive terminal

Aurora is also "close to announcing" a ground handling operation and executive terminal at another undisclosed, non-Middle Eastern airport.

The 45 minute to one hour drive across the new road from Fujairah to Dubai is seen as a real boon for the aviation company – but it is development closer to home that is really exciting the new FBO team.

The development is a land reclamation project just outside Fujairah city, which has been earmarked for oil storage and oil product distribution.

Aurora is part of the same company, Aurora Progress, which is working with the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) for the development of a Fujairah oil and product storage facility. This will have a total capacity of 641,000 cubic meters of storage across 20 tanks, handling fuel oils, gasolines, naphthas, and middle distillates. Services will include tank-to-tank blending, inline blending into ship, bulk



Top: Aurora's first visitor touches down at Fujairah. And below: The emirate's new oil bunkering development.

breaking and bulk aggregating. The storage facility will help meet the growing demand in the developing trading hub of Fujairah.

"Fujairah is becoming a major world trading point for oil products in the same way that Singapore and Rotterdam are," said Kutait. "It is the third largest hub in the world but there was a shortage of storage. Now that has changed."

Trading hubs like this have a record for requiring business aviation support. Urgent need for engineers, parts, crew or for senior management/investor activities mean private aviation facilities are busy.

Aurora moved into supply of jet fuel for the aviation retail markets "That's really why we entered the aviation business. One thing led to another; we found that we could service

customers no matter who they are," explained Kutait.

"We didn't want to be just another flight support company. We started looking at Fujairah. The whole emirate has been 'unseen'. But Abu Dhabi is putting in a pipeline, Saudi Arabia is interested and everyone is looking at Fujairah.

"The airport is doing a good job in marketing the advantages.

"There are delays at Dubai because it is so busy. As Fujairah, customs and immigration is quick. We had our first private jet land and it was very quick. We had a crew there and it all went very smoothly.

"We think technical stops will be a big thing for Fujairah too. There could be more aircraft being based at Fujairah in the future. For us it is a small part of what we are doing, but there are prospects."



The World Food Programme is the World Largest Humanitarian Aid Organization with more than 70 Aircraft bringing humanitarian cargo and aid workers to cut-off communities in the most inaccessible places on the planet





The Agusta-Bell AB-212 saw police action in Sharjah.  
PICTURE: RENE KÖHLER

**T**he seven emirates that together form the federation that is the UAE are independent constitutional monarchies.

Their rulers (or emirs) retain absolute power within the individual emirates but choose one of their members to be the president of the federation.

Thus Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Emir of Abu Dhabi, serves as president and head of state, while Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, serves as prime minister and deputy president, and acts as the head of government.

Each emirate retains autonomy within its own territory but a percentage of its revenue is allocated to the UAE's central budget.

**Common policies**

The UAE pursues common policies in the areas of foreign affairs, security and defence, nationality and immigration issues, education, public health, currency, postal and telecommunications services, labour relations and banking, as well as air traffic control and the licensing of aircraft.

There is a national judiciary, including a Federal Supreme Court, but Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah do not belong to this. All other responsibilities are reserved to the individual emirates.

As a result, the UAE has unified, common armed forces. The UAE Air Force and Air Defence (UAE AF&AD) is thus headquartered at Bateen AFB, in Abu Dhabi, and this HQ administers a Western Air Command (controlling bases at Al Safran, Al Bateen, Al Dhafra and Al Ain), and an Eastern Air

*Jon Lake takes a look at the tricky world of military and police aviation in the northern emirates.*

# How teamwork boosts flight services across the emirates

Command in Dubai, with the air base of Minhad. There are no UAE AF&AD airfields or major facilities in any of the northern emirates.

Six of the seven emirates do have Government flight services for VIP transport duties, the exception being Ajman, the smallest of the emirates, which lacks an airport, as does Umm Al Quwain.

Three of the emirates (Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah and Umm Al Quwain) use aircraft on loan from Fujairah Aviation and/or from Dubai's Air Wing/Royal Flight. There are also four police aviation elements, in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah.

**Air element**

Between them, the seven emirates operate six Government flight services. The largest of these are Abu Dhabi's Amiri Flight, the Private Flight Directorate, which operates from Bateen Airport, and the Dubai Air Wing flying from Dubai International Airport.

The Private Flight Directorate operates examples of the Boeing 737-8EX, the 747-4F6, the 747-48E, the 777-2AN(ER) and the 777-35R(ER), as well as the BAe 146-RJ70 and RJ100.

The Dubai Air Wing air element is bigger, and includes two BAe 146-RJ85s, an A320-232X, a Boeing 737-7E0 (BBJ), a Boeing 737-8EC, a Boeing 737-8AJ and a 737-8E0 (all BBJ2s). There are also a Boeing 747-422 and a -433, as well as a dedicated Boeing 747-412F freighter.

The flight also has AW139 helicopters, a Beech 1900D, a Gulfstream G-IV and a Lockheed L-100-30

Continued on Page 102



A Bell helicopter more used to the northern emirates is pictured at Agrarflug in Ahlen Germany during an overhaul.

PICTURE BY RENE KÖHLER

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 101**

Hercules. Some of these are used by Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah and Umm al Quwain.

The ruler of Sharjah Air Wing replaced its Boeing 737-2W8 with an Airbus A319-133X ACJ, which briefly operated as part of the Dubai Air Wing, while the ruler of Fujairah Air Element uses an A320-232, which does form part of the Dubai Air Wing, and borrows aircraft from Fujairah Aviation.

The ruler of Ras Al Khaimah Air Element uses loan aircraft from the Dubai Air Wing and Fujairah Aviation, as does the Umm Al Quwain Royal Flight Air Element.

Fujairah Aviation operates examples of the Learjet 60, and of the Dassault Falcon 7X, the Falcon 900DX, and the Falcon 2000.

UAE police air units are tasked with HEMS and SAR duties, though their helicopters are also used for VIP, VVIP and transport missions, and most of the helicopters in use are also equipped with FLIR turrets and rescue winches.

The various police forces see their role as being wider than merely providing security and law enforcement, and all use their air units to operate proactively with other agencies to try to achieve a safer society, operating cooperatively and collaboratively with the Air Force and the armed forces, and with the health services.

As with other Government activities in the UAE, Abu Dhabi and Dubai lead in the field of police aviation.

The Abu Dhabi Police Air Wing operates eight AgustaWestland AW139s, five Agusta-Bell AB412EPs and a pair of MBB BK117s. These operate from three bases, at Al Bateen, Al Ain and Liwa, with Abu Dhabi Aviation providing maintenance and support to the fleet at Al Bateen.

The Dubai Police Air Element operates the Agusta-Bell AB412EP and AB412HP, the AgustaWestland A109K2 and the Bell 206B, all based at Dubai International Airport. The Dubai Interior Ministry Department of Civil Defence also operates helicopters, having taken delivery of a number of ex-military Bell UH-1s for aerial fire-fighting. These are painted bright yellow and are equipped with water cannon.

Sharjah Police has an air unit equipped with Agusta-Bell AB212s and AB412EPs, as well as US-built Bell 412EPs, Bell 206B-3s and MBB BK117B-1s. This operates from Sharjah airport.

Unlike the other police air units, Ras Al Khaimah is equipped with PZL Mil Mi-2s and Mil Mi-8MTV-1s, operating from the Ras Al Khaimah police station.

**Fire-fighting helicopters**

Further expansion of the 'parapublic' aviation sector seems likely within the UAE generally, and especially within the 'Northern emirates'.

There is a perceived need for more dedicated aerial fire-fighting helicopters and for helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS) and air ambulance aircraft, while some believe that the piecemeal search and rescue service (now largely provided by the various police air elements) should be rationalised and properly structured. This would leave the police helicopters dedicated to law enforcement, internal security and traffic operations.

But to facilitate these developments, there needs to be further easing of airspace restrictions, and greater investment in infrastructure, especially including airfields and heliports. There also needs to be greater communication and coordination between Government departments and agencies.

When Falcon Aviation Services (FAS) took over responsibilities for maritime search and rescue (SAR) from the UAE Air Force, the company was able to achieve a 98.6% availability rate against the 90% mandated in the contract, and was able to ensure that three out of four aircraft were continually available (from a fleet of two Bell 412EPs and two AW139s). But it found that inter-agency communication and launch authority was often confused, and that one organisation would frequently countermand orders from other agencies to launch an aircraft. These early difficulties have been solved in the SAR field, but any expansion of HEMS would probably run into similar problems, as well as some new challenges.

One such challenge could be coordinating the efforts of existing aero-medical service providers who include the UAE Air Force, three police air wings (Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah), as well as Abu Dhabi Aviation, Royal Jet and Falcon Aviation Services).

Another problem could be meeting short-reaction, round-the-clock standby and readiness times of 15 minutes during the day and 30 minutes at night.

Plans for a major expansion of HEMS operations could be further complicated by an international shortage of qualified flight paramedics, and the difficulties inherent in building a system that will keep them current in their medical training.

Many believe that the introduction of medical insurance into the UAE will further complicate matters, especially in trying to achieve standardisation in policy and procedures.



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**T**he ninth Airex show in Istanbul served to illustrate that the city, which famously straddles the Bosphorus and marks where Europe meets Asia, is well placed for an airline hub and MRO centre.

However, the city is clearly straining under a burgeoning population (now estimated to be almost 16 million) and lack of airport capacity.

At the show's opening Sani Sener, chairman of event sponsor TAV Airports, said Airex was "crucial to show the development of the Turkish aviation industry". Turkish Airlines chairman Hamdi Topçu confirmed that the next event, in 2014, would be known as the 'Istanbul Airshow' for the first time.

Airex was held at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport, on the European side of the Bosphorus. Opposite the main terminal areas, on the North West side of the main runway, is the general aviation terminal, replete with numerous pictures of the celebrities who have passed through over the years, and a vast ramp area in front of a line of private aviation hangars.

#### **New facility officially opened**

At first sight it seems they are FBO facilities but of the six or seven only two are FBOs – one is General Aviation Maintenance Centre and the other is AMAC Aerospace's new facility, which was officially opened on the second day of the show.

On the GA ramp were various business jets and turboprops – including AMAC's Pilatus PC-12. And, ahead of the official midday event opening, a giant Emirates Airbus 380 joined them, along with a Turkish Airlines 737NG.

At the Airex opening, Turkish transport minister Binali Yıldırım confirmed plans for a new airport with tenders imminent, and a rather ambitious opening date of 2015. Situated outside the city to the West it would have three runways and handle 90 million passengers a year, ultimately increasing to 150 million.

Turkish tourist traffic rose by 10% last year to

*Turkey has made an impact on the world's aerospace scene – now what was a small regional show is making a play to become a giant that straddles continents.*

**Ian Sheppard visits Airex and gives his verdict.**

# TALKING TURKEY

almost 31.5 million and Ataturk itself now attempts to deal with around 33 million passengers a year. Some 75% of Turkish airport capacity is accounted for.

While there was nothing unusual to notice about security at Ataturk airport itself, at hotels and shopping centres a typical feature is X-ray security scanners, pre-dating the troubles in Syria (with which Turkey has a long border) but accelerating in number nonetheless.

Among the 150 or so exhibitors in the rather hot exhibition marquee was an indigenous security firm, X-Ray Center, which has developed its own scanner.

General manager Kami Havlucuyan said the company was a dealer for Rapiscan scanners until 2010, when it started producing its own device, which is selling well across the region. It has also formed a partnership with Flir Systems, the security

specialist that was also exhibiting at Airex. It provides explosive and narcotic scanning systems alongside X-Ray Center's devices.

Istanbul has seen considerable success in attracting MRO business, which has grown alongside the local operators (Turkish Technic for example) but also attracted third-party business.

MNG Technic is typical; the company's assistant manager, European regional sales, Selçuk Gürz said that although MNG only has a small fleet of its own, it has carried out lots of third-party maintenance. The company was founded in 2002, while the airline itself switched to being a cargo-only operator, which Gürz said was due to high costs such as insurance in operating passenger aircraft. It now has nine Airbus A300-600 freighters and a single A330, just acquired, and Boeing 737 Classics (only 10 aircraft in total).

Significantly, MNG Technic has just completed



**Far left: Celebrations as AMAC opens its new Istanbul hangar; top left: Boeing had a large presence in the hall Above: The Cessna team demonstrated aircraft from an amphibian Caravan to the entry-level Mustang.**

**Left: Turkey's X-Ray Center has developed its own scanner.**

its first A300-600 passenger-to-freight conversion project.

The company's large hangar can handle 16 aircraft and completes around 150 'C' checks annually. The hangar is split into four units of 8000sqm – one being a paint shop. The apron space in front is 25,000sqm.

There are numerous customers from all over the world, including leasing companies, which Gürz puts down to "very competitive labour prices and quality".

The company is hiring engineers and technicians and still has "plenty of capacity" to take on more work.

Approaching the main terminal area on the East side of Ataturk, THY Technic and OnurAir Technic dominate the skyline.

THY Technic is due to be transferred to Sabiha Gökçen Airport, where myTechnic was founded in

2008 and became part of China's Hainan Group in 2010. Both were exhibiting at Airex.

Özgür Özçelik, director of business development for Teknopark Istanbul, adjacent to Sabiha Gökçen International Airport, said Teknopark had great ambitions and strong government support to expand, including aerospace and other industries and a strong university/R&D presence.

Shmet Isik, deputy general manager, said that the park was being developed in four phases running through to 2026, with 62,000sqm of office space being available by December 2012. Revenues derived from R&D activities, as well as salaries of R&D personnel, are exempt from income and corporate taxes until December 31 2023.

Turkey has great ambitions in aviation and aerospace and this was reflected by the presence at Airex of Turkish Airlines and Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), which represents the great

majority of the aircraft/aerospace development projects in the country.

Representatives of both were at the event opening and toured the show, which had a wide range of exhibitors including Airbus, Boeing, Bombardier and Mitsubishi. The likes of Embraer, Gulfstream and Dassault had outside chalets and aircraft on static display.

Embraer Executive Jets president Ernie Edwards said that he had noticed "huge differences" in Turkish infrastructure since his last visit seven years ago. He noted the reach of Embraer's product range out of Istanbul, a nicely "centralised" city; for example the Phenom could fly to London or Dubai non-stop, while the Lineage could make Singapore.

Although the company's 16 service centres worldwide doesn't include one in Turkey yet, he said: "If we were approached we would consider it,

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depending on the investment they were prepared to make. We already have a Phenom 100 and 300 and a Legacy 600 in Turkey. The aircraft population always comes first but having a service centre locally is a better proposition.”

Dassault brought a 2000LX and a 7X model. Chief test pilot Philippe Deleume said his team of 12 pilots was busy working on the 2000S, which has various improvements, such as full-wing slats, to allow operations out of shorter runways. This, he said, would help in areas such as Turkey and the Middle East.

Various local dealers were present at Airex, many who had seen significant change in the country over recent decades. Perhaps the best example was EMAIR, which was celebrating 40 years as the country's Cessna dealer – and was displaying various aircraft including a Cessna 172S Skyhawk and a Citation Sovereign.

Kemal Gürsan, a director of EMAIR, said that the company was founded by his grandfather in 1962. Based in Ankara Esenboga Airport, it started out crop spraying and then, in the 1980s, became the first operator in Turkey to have scheduled flights with two Cessna 206s and a 421 – Ankara-Bodrum being their first route.

In 1994 the company started a maintenance arm at its base and in 2010 it moved to a new hangar facility.

Kemal's father, Selim Gürsan, also talked about establishing a presence in Istanbul. “We have stepped back a little over the last couple of months as progress is fast now towards a new airport. They will announce a new tender this month. Traffic projections have surpassed everything... THY has grown hugely, they now have close to 200 aircraft.” He added that an A380 order was now firmly on THY's radar but the airport wasn't really equipped for its size.

Rolls-Royce was exhibiting and marketing director Scott Holland admitted it was almost entirely to support a hoped-for engine orders from Turkish if it buys Airbus A380s and/or A350s.

Gürsan senior added: “Sebiha Goczen has become very crowded as well with just one

#### Turkish Airlines modern fleet provided a backdrop to the show.



landing strip and parking is very limited. Once an aircraft lands they don't let it stay for more than three days.”

Selim Gürsan said that there were 32 Cessna jets in the country now. “Growth has not been too fast – we are affected by the crisis too. We have the biggest number of business jets in Turkey (Cessna compared to other manufacturers) though the trend is more to bigger aircraft.”

With light aircraft, EMAIR sold 46 C172 Skylanes to the land forces in the past two years, which are being used for training. It also has ten with Turkish Airlines and sold the airline two Mustangs as well.

#### Exclusive distributor

Making its presence felt in a big way at Airex was Swiss company AMAC Aerospace, which opened its new FBO hangar at Ataturk Airport on September 7. The company had stands in the hall and static display, with a Pilatus PC12NG – the company became exclusive distributor for the type in the Middle East at the beginning of 2012.

Atilla Güney, AMAC chief operating officer, said that that company took over the Istanbul hangar in May from the previous operator. “We got the licence from the Turkish CAA to create a third-party MRO operation – they've accepted the certification and we're waiting for our assigned

manager.” The company is hoping to receive EASA Part 145 approval some time between December and the end of February.

“Our first target is to be an authorised service centre for the PC12 and we're doing an analysis to choose a second business aircraft type. We'll conclude that in one or two months.”

Güney, who used to work for Tailwind Airlines (the Sabiha Goczen-based airline of which AMAC CEO and co-founder Kadri Muhiddin is a board member) said that the company's analysis had shown that there were “more than 95 private aircraft in Turkey and more than 300 transport aircraft in total.”

The company is aiming to create a high-quality operation based on its established operation in Basle, Switzerland, but with manpower costs half those in Europe, and being closer to the Middle East.

AMAC group CFO Mauro Grossi said: “We want to have a foot in this area and it's a door to the Middle East. Turkey is the fastest expanding economy in the European area, so if it works we'll look at further expansion.”

On the regional aviation side, Mitsubishi was exhibiting for the first time, headed up by its Amsterdam sales office.

Akinori Kojima, president of Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation Europe, admitted that in Europe “it's not so easy to get the firm orders” although he thought it would be better after another recent US order.

While he cited the economy as the main reason holding business back, it was also market-fit: “Our product is more for feeder services and in Europe airlines don't need such a long-range capability. It's different in the US. Our aircraft is good for routes where there is not enough demand for bigger aircraft, or you operate three or four times a week and want to increase frequency and load factors.”

He also recognised another key factor in Europe – airport congestion. With slots at a premium, bigger aircraft are favoured more than they would be otherwise, and “you cannot easily increase frequencies”.

New airports in places like Istanbul could help, he said. “Turkish Airlines is definitely looking at regional jets but they need a new airport,” he claimed. The company is waiting to fly its 90-seater (in the second half of 2013) before finalising the



The Pilatus PC-12 now set for a wider presence across MENA and Turkey with AMAC the region's new distributor

design of its proposed 100-seater, which Kojima admitted airlines wanted.

Lack of open skies agreements and a continued focus on big aircraft and long-haul service was holding back potential customers in the Middle East region, said Kojima. "They're not so interested in feeder flights," he said.

Bombardier was present with Global 6000 large cabin business jets, a Learjet 60XR and a Challenger 605.

Raphael Haddad, VP sales Middle East and Africa for Bombardier Commercial Aircraft said: "Turkey, as a gateway to both the Middle East and Europe, has the potential to be a breakout market for Bombardier."

With the company's regional jets Haddad said there were Q-Series and CRJs all around the region (230 in total), although not in Turkey at the moment. He noted that Olympic Airways of Greece "switched from ATRs to Q400s not long ago" and that LOT did a similar thing. ATR has in-country operator Borajet, however.

While Haddad said the Q400 turboprop would be ideal for Turkey, ATR sales director Raffaele Fiorentini said on the company's Airex stand that Borajet had no complaints and he hinted at a hope for a follow-on order.

Haddad, who had been speaking with the



**Top: AMAC's new hangar.**  
**Above: Gulfstream led the business aviation push at the show.**

chairman of Atlas Jet, said: "We're in discussion with all the major carriers in Turkey – all are interested in aircraft, especially recently."

Much of that interest has been in the new C Series twin-jet airliner. "For the C Series it is very simple; it is new technology – a narrow-body with wide-body feel and performance. Most important to airlines is low operating cost and our 135-seater CS300 model will have the same seat-mile cost as an A320 or 737-800 (160 seaters), which means a 25-30% lower trip cost without the risk of not filling the aircraft."

Haddad added a similar comparison applied with the CS100 and the A319.

"Our model is a complimentary model, above a regional jet size but compliments other manufacturers' wide-bodies, filling the gap between 100 and 149 seats.

"We're not focussing on capturing large orders," he admitted. "The focus is on small customers and orders – we'd rather sell 100 aircraft to 10 different customers as the liquidity of the product is very important."

Orders from Swiss, Braathens Leasing of Sweden and airBaltic had helped its market credibility in Europe and the Middle East, said Haddad, who hinted that a Middle East order was still very much on the cards.



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# TWEET WISE

## HOW AIRLINES ARE MAKING THE MOST OF SOCIAL MEDIA

*Is social media a toy or great free marketing tool?*

**Steve Nichols** looks at how it is being handled by different airlines.

**G**etting your company to fully make use of social media is easy isn't it? All you have to do is send out a few tweets on Twitter and have a Facebook account. Oh, and while you are at it, make sure the chief executive has a blog – written by someone else obviously.

Well, no! It takes more than this, but the rewards can be substantial as many airlines are finding out.

According to a Socialbakers' study, airlines are the second most "socially-devoted" industry on Facebook.

It showed that airline brands on Facebook received 30,000 questions from their fans over a three-month period. From March 1–May 30 2012, their global Facebook pages answered up to 55% of the 30,000 questions posted by their customers and fans to their walls.

KLM became one of the first airlines to integrate social networking into its flight process. KLM passengers can link their Facebook or LinkedIn profiles to their flight through "Meet & Seat" to see who else is on board and eventually choose who they want to sit next to. Business travellers apparently like using the system for networking purposes.

Virgin America has also embraced social media

and has run promotions using social media platforms as diverse as Twitter, Foursquare, Loopt, Groupon and Klout.

Virgin also looks for ways to reward its audience. In 2010 the airline partnered with Klout to provide free flights to Twitter "influencers" – people who make waves in social media, convince them your brand is great, and tell their large audiences why they should fly Virgin.

But what about the Middle East region?

Royal Jordanian had a different approach to social media when it launched its new Facebook and Twitter channels in May 2011. It rounded up 20 of the top bloggers and Twitter users (or "tweeps") in the country and put them on a Royal Jordanian Airbus A320 aircraft to "meet and tweet".

The guests began tweeting for their chance to win prizes and free airline tickets. The result was that more than 1,500 tweets went out with the "#RJLaunch" hashtag, resulting in more than 1,200 new followers (which has since grown to more than 18,000). The event also generated major international news coverage.

Diya Murra, the project manager working on Royal Jordanian

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Airlines' social media strategy said that it was talking directly with its passengers in a new hip way – "their way!"

"We want to overcome the traditional 'corporate/customer' relationship and to build them on a more personal level. We want a place where we can engage on a daily basis and find solutions to passengers' enquiries and questions in a timely manner and develop long-lasting relationships with them," he said.

For Facebook, Royal Jordanian has used the minimal amount of advertising and was surprised that it exceeded its benchmarks.

"During the process we found that Jordanians are big believers and huge fans of Royal Jordanian. Also, the campaigns, promotions, and constant updates and posts get us great fan growth. On Twitter all of our followers were acquired organically. Nevertheless, we have used campaigns and promotions that significantly increased the number of followers (eg: #RJLaunch Tweetup and #RJTwitter).

"Engaging and jumping into conversation proactively also helped us get great numbers. We try our best to keep our social media channels relevant to the fans – what's going on in the region from events online and offline. We also run promotions and competitions to keep the fans entertained and the buzz going," Murra said.



He added that one of Royal Jordanian's strengths was that it does its best to answer any questions within 60 minutes, even if it's only by touching base with the fan/follower. Currently, it is scoring an average response time of 12 minutes since the start of 2012.

In terms of social media tools it uses ContentScorer for Twitter – an in-house tool created by its agency, The Online Project, to track the performance of the tweets. This is still in its beta version.

"None of this could've happened without our management's belief and support in the power of social media and The Online Projects' capabilities," Murra added.

One of the finalists of the 3rd Simplifying Awards for Excellence in Social Media, held in Amsterdam in October, was Saudi Arabia's nasair. The airline was launched in the kingdom in 2007 and operates more than 550 weekly flights to 24 destinations.

With more than 360,000 Facebook and 26,000 Twitter followers the company also makes big use of e-mail and mobile websites to get its message across. It has built its social media strategy around three premises – engagement, trust and empathy. It doesn't use gimmicks like games or social loyalty apps and also ensures that social media is



**Above: Akram Husain: It's about conversation. Top: Nas Air moves into profit as its relationship with "fans" grows.**

integrated with its e-mail campaigns.

All its promotions and offers are synchronised with Facebook and Twitter for maximum effect and its Facebook and Twitter URLs are also prominent on all printed media – even on boarding cards.

It also runs competitions on Facebook with the chance to win prizes like free flights. These often attract more than 4,000 entries a day. As many of the prizes (excluding nasair tickets) are sponsored by other companies, the total cost of each competition is marginal.

Akram Husain, interactive marketing director, nasair, said: "We never consider competitions as an effective marketing tool. These competitions are done to build trust.

"They are done in such an effective and transparent manner that they become the talk of

the town. The way we reach out with our winners creates stories by themselves in the community, which gives us a very strong word-of-mouth reach. Marketing becomes a by-product of these competitions."

One important addition is that all nasair winners are announced within 24 hours of the competition closing and winners get their photograph displayed on Facebook – how more social can your media get?

Husain added: "We started our Facebook journey in January 2012 with 7,000 fans but currently we are reaching almost 360,000. Aligning our social media goals with business objectives is the most important aspect of our strategy – it revolves around customers, fans, followers and subscribers."

The airline also received the "Best Interactive Award" from the Pan Arab Awards Academy in Amman recently. This was the first time the airlines category was added under Facebook application awards.

Husain said the airline proudly dedicated this award to nasair customers and fans. He promised continued growth with more appealing promotions and competitions.

And if you thought that Facebook was a flash in the pan, nasair's figures show otherwise. In the first six months of this year its e-mail marketing database grew by 243%. But in the same period its Facebook use saw a phenomenal 4,526% growth.

There is obviously something about Facebook as Twitter usage over the same period only grew by 129%, and mobile website usage "only" 345%.

Husain said: "Social media at nasair is directly responsible for a more than 300% increase in





Above: Royal Jordanian special flight for "tweeps".

referral traffic to our website, which in turn resulted in conversion."

And all this exposure is being reflected in the results. In May, CEO Francois Bouteiller said the carrier was profitable "from an operational perspective" and the airline "enjoyed" a good 1Q2012. The carrier reported its second consecutive month of net profit for the first time in July 2012. Its net result for June 2012 was \$3.8 million, followed by a \$10.9 million profit in July 2012.



Gulf Air has had a similar experience. Shehab Saeed, senior manager marketing for Gulf Air, said that it views social media as a long-term investment.

"Hypothetically speaking, when we have a fan base of a few million followers or friends, then we can reduce our marketing budget," he said.

"We would have built a means of communicating directly with customers or a target segment that is highly relevant to our business. With that kind of critical mass built up one could argue that even to obtain new customers the need for going to traditional media will be much less since the networking effect of friends recommending friends would be enough to sustain growth in the market share ... all hypothetically speaking of course."

Gulf Air was one of the first companies in the region to establish a strong social media presence, recognising the opportunity it created to network, attract passengers, recruit, promote the brand and market services, with minimal financial outlay.

"We are investing in manpower and technical innovations to strengthen our social media and this is a trend that we foresee continuing," said Saeed.

"Currently Gulf Air's business-to-consumer social media strategy is strong. Next year we plan to focus aggressively on business-to-business social media environments.

"Another key focus for us is education, both internally and externally. Externally we will continue to drive the benefit of social media in a bid to challenge the popular regional perception that it is merely a socialising tool.

"Internally we plan to explore the possibility encouraging employees to become more active in the social media arena in order to leverage this mass untapped resource. I definitely see social media taking up a larger share of our marketing efforts year-on-year."

But what is Gulf Air's secret – what does it offer people that draws them in and keeps them happy?

"Engagement, engagement, engagement," Saeed said. "People want information; they want to feel that when they do speak there is someone there to listen and respond.

"The key has been to maintain a high level of activity across all platforms of social media, offer promotions and information that can only be received or at least received first by your followers and fans, and finally ensure that when someone is

critical of us or our product we respond swiftly."

Gulf Air also finds Facebook a useful tool. "It gives us more than one means of communicating in a more comprehensive way," Saeed said. "Twitter is a no-nonsense channel that customers go to get the salient points on any given topic. So although both are important I would say Facebook takes the lead due to the fact that it allows us to do so much more 'face to face' with the customer."

Airlines pay scant attention to their social media strategies at their peril, as witnessed by United Airlines.

In July 2008 Dave Carroll travelled with his band "Sons of Maxwell" to Nebraska for a one-week tour, but the singer's guitar was severely damaged by United baggage handlers. He wasn't compensated, even after nine months of campaigning.

He was so frustrated that he decided to write and produce a song about his experience called "United Breaks Guitars". It instantly became an internet viral hit – but it took United Airlines a whole week to react to the video, causing a 10% decrease in its stock price, not to mention the humiliation caused by more than 12 million YouTube views to date.

United has a habit of dropping the ball. In August Bob Sutton, a Stanford professor who writes about management and organisations, related on his blog how friends of his had sent their 10-year-old daughter unaccompanied on United to summer camp, assured by the airline that it would take good care of her.



But the girl missed her connection in Chicago – apparently because the airline employees who were supposed to help her failed to show up.

When the girl asked for help from other employees, they allegedly told her several times that they were too busy. And the parents only found out about it hours later, when the summer camp called to say their daughter had never arrived. When they called United, they were put on hold for 40 minutes, then told that the whole situation was no big deal.

The girl eventually turned up but it was only after the parents contacted a local TV station that United got serious about apologising and addressing their concerns, according to Sutton.

Sutton's blog post struck a chord on Twitter and Facebook and, as it circulated, others began to add their own tales of United woe. United's own Facebook page and Twitter feed then became a melting pot for their anger.

It just shows how one or two unhappy customers can have a negative impact on a business when it doesn't deliver decent customer care – or have a decent social media policy.



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# Helishow is going up in the world

The Blackhawk (left) and the Bell 429 are two of the helicopters that have found a place in the region.

*Dubai Helishow – the biennial helicopter technology and operations exhibition – returns to Dubai in November with a new venue, new exhibitors and more outdoor static helicopters than ever before.*  
**Kelly Green**  
*reports.*

Since it was launched in 2004, the Dubai Helishow has become an important event for the helicopter industry, showcasing products, services and technologies covering the commercial, civil defence and military helicopter sectors.

“The region is both an expanding and lucrative market place for the civil and military helicopter sectors,” said Julia Cuthbert, director of Dubai Helishow at The Domus Group. “Business during the show is undertaken face-to-face and this is the culture in the Middle East for developing future business relationships.”

The trade show is moving to a new venue – the Grand Stand, Meydan Racecourse of Al Meydan City. “This offers people a fantastic platform for networking within a modern, light and airy hall overlooking the outdoor helicopter static/demo area,” explained Cuthbert. “The five star Meydan Hotel on site is hosting many of our attendees.”

The new racecourse location also enables the organisers to offer another attraction. “There is a race meeting on the final evening of the show, attracting an additional 3,000-4,000 visitors,” said Cuthbert.

More than 100 exhibitors are anticipated at the show, which has become the third largest international civil and military helicopter technology and operations exhibition. International contributors from the US, Canada, UK, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, Russia, Turkey, Australia, Ukraine, Czech Republic and Qatar, along with representatives from the UAE, will be participating.

Among the exhibitors returning to the show are Russian Helicopters, Boeing, Honeywell, Lockheed Martin, Aerogulf, AviaHelp, HR Smith Group, Enterprise Control Systems, and Gulf Helicopters.

Also returning is Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation, following its success at the 2010 Helishow where it settled a 60 Blackhawk utility helicopters business deal worth an estimated \$300 million with the United Arab Emirates Air Force.

Team Seahawk (Sikorsky- manufacturer of helicopters,

and Lockheed Martin- helicopter missiles and fire control manufacturers) along with the US Navy will be promoting the MH-60R and MH-60S multi-role helicopters.

Bell Helicopters, along with its UAE independent representative Hawker Pacific Airservices, is also returning to display its BELL 429 twin helicopter. Alan Parsons, vice president aircraft sales, Hawker Pacific, ME Region, said: “The Bell 429’s exceptional hot and high performance capabilities are particularly suited to the Middle East’s demanding environment, delivering exceptional speed, range, hover performance, versatility and enhanced safety margins. It offers operators a state-of-the-art single pilot IFR helicopter with the latest advancements in cockpit technology, best in class spacious cabin and excellent maintainability.”

The show has also attracted a number of first-time participants this year, including 50-year-old helicopter manufacturer Enstrom Helicopter Corporation. In addition to showcasing a state-of-the-art 480B light turbine helicopter, Enstrom senior executives will be attending to meet potential customers and supporting organisations.

“With the expected growth in the Middle Eastern market, this couldn’t have come at a better time,” said director of sales and marketing Tracy Biegler.

“Enstrom is a growing company and we are developing new markets, turning our focus to Russia and the Middle East. The decision to attend this year’s event was made, primarily, because we are looking for potential representatives and service centres in the region.”

Air Medical, ARMA-Global, Griffon Aerospace, Thales, and Schiebel will also be exhibiting for the first time.

Griffon will be demonstrating its UAV (drone) for the first time, highlighting the UAV sector and the importance of surveillance.

“We witnessed a tangible growth in the business deals signed in 2010 and look forward to seeking further opportunities between exhibitors and VVIP buyers in 2012,” said Abdulla Abulhoul, director of the Dubai Helishow at the Domus Group.

# IN THE FIRING LINE...

*The skyscraper cityscapes that stand out in the Gulf States have one nightmare scenario – high-rise fire. But this year’s Helishow in Dubai is focusing on the issue as **Jon Lake** reports.*

**A**s cities prosper, land values increase and architects design ever-taller buildings, packing more office, hotel or living accommodation into the same ‘ground footprint’.

Sometimes there is a real need to build high-rise blocks for this reason, or sometimes cities embrace high-rise developments in order to look more ‘modern’, aping the most successful megalopolis cities like New York or Tokyo, even where there may perhaps be little or less apparent need to do so.

But even in Dubai, high-rise development allows easier proximity to particular areas, allows greater hotel and office capacity exactly where that capacity is needed, and helps to prevent an unmanageable sprawl.

High-rise living affords its occupants city-centre convenience and breath-taking views. The latest buildings are often well appointed and full of every possible modern convenience. Many offer prestige and luxury.

But there are drawbacks and disadvantages, too.

In the event of any emergency, evacuation can be problematic and slow, and fire, in particular, can be especially hard to tackle, as was shown after the World Trade Centre’s twin towers were attacked on September 11 2001.

The fires raging high above ground level were almost impossible to tackle and many were trapped above the flames, or were unable to evacuate before

the buildings collapsed, leading to massive loss of life, as well as the destruction of the buildings themselves.

But as well as highlighting the difficulty of fighting fires high in very tall buildings, 9/11 also emphasised the difficulty that can be encountered in rescuing people on higher floors. Many of those who died in the World Trade Centre did so because they were unable to descend past the raging fires, and some died when they chose to jump from the towers in the face of encroaching smoke and fire.

Before 9/11, casualties in skyscraper fires had been relatively light – the 1946 Winecoff Hotel fire in Atlanta killed 119 people in the 15-floor building, while the Las Vegas MGM Grand fire that occurred on November 21 1980 killed 84 people in the 23-storey resort. Another 97 died in the Dupont Plaza Hotel fire in Puerto Rico on December 31 1986.

But when the World Trade Centre Towers were hit, 2,312 people were killed, demonstrating the potential for disaster in really tall buildings (both towers had 110 floors, and were more than 1,360ft tall).

While sprinkler systems and strictly enforced and rigorous fire regulations can reduce the likelihood of serious fires, emergency services face a real challenge in fighting any fire and reducing loss of life above a certain height – above which conventional fire fighting equipment, ladders and hoses cannot reach.





**Main picture:** The high buildings of modern Dubai are an obvious candidate for the need for aerial firefighting.

**Inset:** The Erikson S64 is proving an able firefighter.

This 'danger height' is sometimes defined as the seventh floor of a high-rise building, or is sometimes classed as being above the 11th floor.

This disparity is, in part, due to the effect of new telescopic devices like the Aquamast aerial fire-fighting system, a 7-13 metre mast which can be fitted to small fire trucks, trailers, and other specialist vehicles, and which can be deployed in narrow streets where conventional fire engines may be too wide or may not carry tall enough ladders.

Helicopters provide an even better solution to the problems of both fire-fighting and rescue at greater heights, though specialised equipment and techniques are needed.

In conventional helicopter fire-fighting operations, helicopter 'tankers' typically drop water vertically on to a blaze – using under-slung Bambi buckets or fixed tanks. For high-rise fire-fighting, drenching a building from the roof down may be ineffective, and there is a need to deliver water horizontally into the seat of the fire, ideally using a water cannon.

Dubai hosts the world's tallest building, the 2,732ft Burj Khalifa, as well as the 1,053ft Burj Al Arab (the fourth tallest hotel in the world).

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With 911 completed high-rise buildings –88 of them taller than 180 metres (591ft) and 18 of them above 300 metres (984ft) – and 363 new skyscrapers under construction in 2012, the Emirate has an obvious interest in high-rise fire-fighting and in the use of helicopters in this role.

At the request of the Dubai Police Air Wing, Tangent Link is hosting a unique conference at the Dubai Helishow, focusing on high-rise fire-fighting. At this event, helicopter and fire-fighting equipment manufacturers will debate and explore the issues with representatives from international emergency services, as well as from civil and government helicopter operators.

The emergency services in Dubai face a wide range of choices when it comes to equipment, when it comes to helicopters, and when it comes to operating models.

What the Americans call helo high-rise fire-fighting and rescue is not just about equipment, as Larry Collins from the County of Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) will demonstrate at the conference. He will describe how the LAFD air operations unit has established a dedicated fire-fighting and rescue team.

**Turbine-powered**

The air operations unit was established in 1962 with a single Bell 47, subsequently growing to a fleet of larger turbine-powered helicopters, with Bell 412s, Sikorsky S-70 Firehawks and, most recently, AgustaWestland AW139s. These serve as both air ambulances and as fire attack resources, operating from Fire Station 114 adjacent to Van Nuys Airport.

An alternative operating model will be described by Radik Asylbaev, the head of the aviation department at the Russian Federation's Ministry for Civil Defence, Emergencies & the Elimination of Natural Disasters (EMERCOM), presenting Moscow as a case study for the use of helicopters in an urban environment.

Fire-fighting helicopters come in all shapes and sizes but so far relatively few have a water cannon capability. Of those that do, the largest is the Erickson S-64 Aircrane, a development of the Sikorsky S-64/CH-54 Skycrane incorporating more than 300 design changes and improvements.

The Aircrane incorporates a 25,000lb load capacity, allowing it to carry a 2,650gallon (10,000litre) tank with microprocessor controlled tank doors that allow eight different coverage levels, automatically adjusting for airspeed and giving a flow rate that matches the selected coverage level.

Almost uniquely among helicopters, the Aircrane combines the delivery capacity of fixed-wing tanker aircraft with the manoeuvring capability of the helicopter, and with the ability to hover, making it possible to use a targeted water cannon.

Exactly such a water cannon has been added to the



Aircrane in recent years, able to propel a stream of water or foam mix from 150-200 feet at a rate of 300 gallons per minute. A constant stream can thereby be maintained for up to eight minutes.

In addition to operating its own fleet of Aircranes, Erickson is marketing the type to other customers, including foreign fire-fighting services.

A number of alternative water cannon are available for smaller fire-fighting helicopters. One such is offered by Simplex (which manufactures the composite fire-fighting tank for the Aircrane and designs similar tanks and fire attack systems for a number of other helicopter types). Simplex entered the fire-fighting market in the early 1990s, initially designing a tank system for Russian Helicopters' Kamov Ka-32.

**Aerial cleaning system**

More recently, Simplex has adapted its third-generation aerial cleaning system (ACS), designed for the routine cleaning of power lines and insulators (significantly enhancing power transmission and generation) into an aerial fire-fighting system, aiming the new hydro foam cannon at the growing requirement for fire-fighting for high-rise buildings.

The ACS system already used a power-wash boom in conjunction with high-capacity belly-mounted water tanks, and the fire-fighting derivative adds a new compressed air/foam system, developed by Heliap Aviation Products. The chemical-reaction pressure system allows delivery of 1,000 cubic feet per minute of a water/foam mixture (0.4% foam) at 500psi, giving a range of about 120ft.

Like the ACS's power-wash system, the water cannon boom extends past the main-rotor disc, preventing the water/foam mixture from dissipating in the downwash, and maintaining a concentrated 'stream' with which to fight fires. The hydro foam cannon can also be used to apply dry foam to the outside of the building to prevent any fire from spreading upwards.

The roll-on/roll-off Simplex model 516 fire attack system was developed for the Eurocopter EC

225 and was demonstrated on a Chinese Haifei H425 from 2009.

The system adds water/foam/retardant tanks, a 23hp Honda power pack (consisting of a motor, pump, and generator), a 6.7 metre high-strength carbon fibre boom (with an aerating spray nozzle) which is power-operated from the fore-and-aft 'ferry' position to a perpendicular operating position.

The system also includes a FLIR system and two laser range finders, one for the pilot and one for the fire fighter operator, which measure distance between the aircraft and buildings or other hazards, even in the densest smoke.

A rival to the Simplex system is offered by the German IFEX company, which developed its Impulse fire extinguishing system (IFEX) in 1994.

IFEX is based on high-pressure, high-speed jets of smaller quantities of atomised micro water droplets (1-30 litres) using specifically adapted water cannons.

**Impulse bullets**

These fire 'water bombs' (also known as impulse bullets) that can achieve speeds of more than 400km/h (allowing much more precise aiming), and whose droplets break down to about 100 microns, dramatically increasing the surface area of the water fired, and thereby increasing its cooling effect. This naturally reduces the quantity of water needed to extinguish a given blaze.

Originally developed for use on a ground-based vehicle, the IFEX cannon was quickly adapted for aerial use, and especially for fighting high-rise fires. Initially, IFEX designed installations for the Eurocopter AS-350B2/B3 Ecureuil, and the Kaman K-MAX.

One system is an aluminium/carbon fibre tank designed by Kawak Aviation Technologies, while the other is the all carbon-fibre Isolair Eliminator II tank. Both systems use a hydraulically-powered hover refill pump and feature computer or electrically-controlled door systems.

The Ecureuil is limited by being a single-engined helicopter and by the small capacity of its tanks, and the relatively modest 50metre range of its cannon, while the K-MAX is not EASA certificated, and is not routinely or commonly operated or supported outside the USA.

These factors led IFEX to search for a further platform, settling on the Kamov Ka-32A11BC, integrating the 25litre dual cannon with a 75metre range. The initial conversion was undertaken by Helifor in Croatia, and Russian Helicopters and EMERCOM were heavily involved in the programme.

The Ka-32, with its coaxial main rotor, is powerful and agile, and its lack of a tail rotor gives relatively compact dimensions, useful for operating in urban environments. The aircraft can carry up to five tonnes of water or retardant.



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*Arinc is making its presence felt more widely in the Middle East with a new customer at Ras Al Khaimah, on-going projects in Doha and Dubai and a new office in Saudi Arabia. Steve Nichols reports.*

## Arinc continues to expand presence in Middle East

**A**rinc announced a multi-million dollar, 10-year contract in October to implement multiple airport systems at Ras Al Khaimah International Airport (RAK) in the UAE.

The project, which involves the design, supply and installation of the company's core suite of airport passenger processing solutions, as well as advanced airport operational systems, will include the latest common use passenger processing systems (CUPPS) and boarding operations at the expanding airport.

The installation of vMUSE/CUPPS, L-DCS, AirVue (FIDS), AirDB (AODB), InfoHub and Multi-Channel at RAK, in what will be the first off-site hotel check-in and bag drop in the region, will also equip the airport with future intelligence that will change the way people use it today.

It is anticipated that the number of CUPPS workstations and services will increase during the lifetime of the contract, as not only is the existing terminal being expanded, but there are plans for a new passenger terminal, dedicated to charter activity.

Tony Lynch, Arinc's regional director, Middle East and Africa, said the company won the bid through its close collaboration and consultation with the team at RAK.

"We spent 18 months carefully ascertaining their requirements," he said. "From a small hosted L-DCS the scope has been extended to the airport-wide suite of products, which has now been ratified. This is a really big step for us."

Arinc is also moving ahead with work at Doha's new International Airport (NDIA) with the first phase of its systems scheduled to be ready to support customer operations at the end of the year.

The airport, which will be home to Qatar Airways, is being built on around 22sq km of land, much of which has been reclaimed from the sea.

The official opening date had been set as December 12 2012 (12/12/12) but sources in Doha say the airport is unlikely to be ready much before the third quarter of 2013. When it is

completed it will be able to handle 29 million passengers annually. And when fully operational the airport should be able to handle at least 45 million passengers per year.

Arinc, along with partner Thales, was awarded a contract in 2007 to install the airport's IT, security and telecommunications systems inside the main terminal buildings and more than 100 supporting facilities.

The contract covered the installation of Arinc's iMuse common-use terminal equipment (CUTE) at more than 100 check-in desks throughout the ticket hall.

The total value of the contract is now around \$260 million covering the airport's IT, security and network infrastructure, with Arinc being the consortium leader.

Lynch said: "This is one of the largest projects we have ever worked on. Phase one and two are nearing completion and phase three has already started – everything is progressing well.

"We will be ready to support maintenance operations from the end of this year and are currently recruiting our maintenance teams."

### Information exchange infrastructure

The information exchange infrastructure for data movement across the airport is also being installed by Arinc. Thales will work on the safety and security systems and the local area network (LAN) for internet use by passengers.

Arinc has also renewed its contract with Dnata at Dubai International Airport for a further five years. The contract covers an upgrade from Arinc's iMuse (multi-user system environment) to the latest vMuse "virtualised" specification.

The contract includes the delivery of CUPPS and common-use self-service (CUSS) platforms, allowing people to work from remote sites from the Emirates Group data centres.

Arinc is also involved with an extension of systems currently deployed in Terminal 3/Concourse 2 at Dubai, to the new Concourse 3. This will support the building of 20 new dedicated Airbus A380 gates and stands at the airport.

"We expect this to go live in the fourth quarter of this year," said Lynch. The systems provided by Arinc include its AirVUE flight information display system (FIDS), AirPlan resource management system (RMS) and AirDB airport operational database.

The company's relationship with Cairo International (Terminal 3) is also continuing with a sale of its virtualised test system and an extension of the systems already delivered. Arinc also supports the airport with an on-site maintenance team.

The company also has a presence now in Saudi Arabia, having taken over an Arinc office previously used by the defence side of its business. It is looking to expand its business in the country and the office will go some way to supporting this goal.

**Sheikh Salem bin Sultan Al Qasimi chairman of RAK department of civil aviation (centre) flanked by RAK Airport's Andrew Broom and Arinc's Tony Lynch and a team from RAK Airport.**



*As Dubai International Airport's Concourse 3 prepares for a grand opening, Keith Mwanalushi reports that it is just one part of numerous strategies being put in motion to achieve ambitious goals at the region's busiest airport.*

# LAND OF THE THREE

If projections by the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority are right, passenger throughput at Dubai's airports should reach a staggering 98.5 million with more than four million tonnes of freight also being moved by 2020.

Back in 2008 the Dubai Airports Company turned heads with a flawless opening of Dubai International (DXB) Terminal 3, built exclusively for use by flag carrier Emirates.

The airport authority will no doubt be planning another flawless opening of its latest addition to DXB in the form of concourse 3 (C3), which is on track for completion at the end of this year.

"Concourse 3 will be opened to the public in the first quarter of 2013 once we are completely satisfied that it has passed all operational and service readiness tests with flying colours," said Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports, at the Arabian Travel Market event in Dubai earlier this year.

Over the last few months the facility has been undergoing an intensive operational readiness programme (ORAT) to prepare for the official opening. It has included other key stakeholders, notably Emirates, dnata, police and the immigration services.

## High gear

"Over the last few months, our preparatory work moved into high gear. We learned a lot from our experience with Terminal 3," said Griffiths. "We learned that the big bang theory is not the best approach when it comes to opening an airport... soft launches following rigorous testing and operational trials are the only way to go."

The AED 12 billion (\$3.2 billion) C3 will solely cater for Emirates Airlines. It is now the world's first purpose-built A380 facility and will have a capacity for 19 million passengers a year pushing international travellers at DXB to 75 million.

The new concourse is spread over 500,000sqm through 11 levels featuring 20 contacts gates and 13 remote stands.

Dubai Airports indicate that C3 is very similar to concourse 2 in terms of appearance but with a smaller footprint. Technically the C3 project is an extension and continued development of concourses 1 and 2.

It is a fully airside structure and is connected to the two major public levels of Concourse 2 and Terminal 3 via an automated people mover (APM), in addition to the vehicular and baggage handling system utility tunnels.

## Partially underground

C3 is partially underground, comprising the APM stations (both arriving and departing) and, like C2, the lower and upper levels are connected by means of a special vertical transportation system (sky trains) that acts as a focal point feature in a central atrium.

While the arrival and departure levels are similar to Concourse 2, the first and business class levels are further split up and are located one above the other, below the hotel level, which also includes a health club and a business centre. The hotel will feature both four- and five-star operations.

Travellex won the tender to operate foreign exchange at C3. The company will operate the only stand-alone bureau de change at the new facility, in the airside departures area. Travellex director of business development Graham Flannery said the outlet would feature "cutting edge design and technology to provide an exceptional customer experience".

He added: "The Middle East is one of the most rapidly growing regions for our business and Dubai, in particular, has demonstrated and continues to demonstrate outstanding growth. We are working on an innovative store concept, which

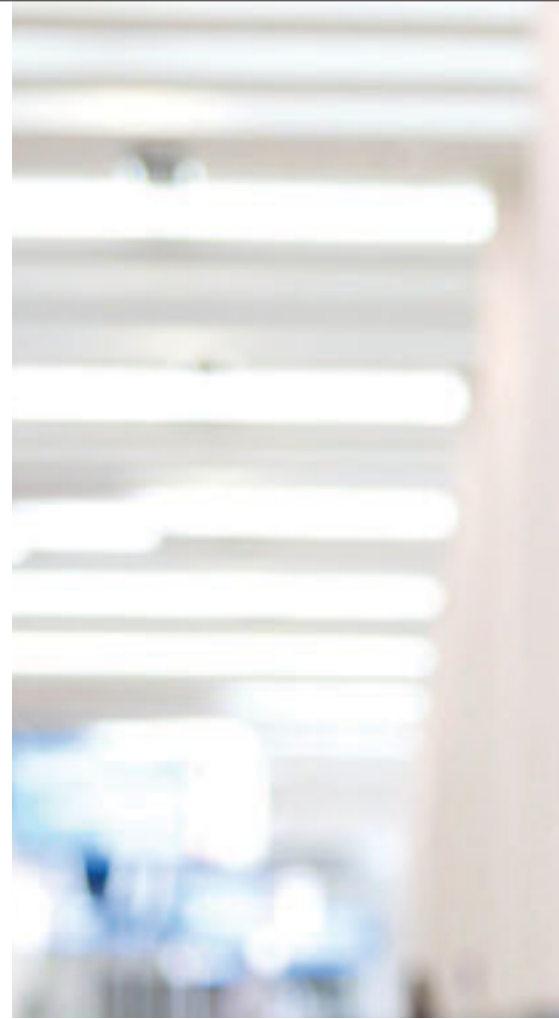
will allow us to provide a more interactive customer journey as well as utilising new technology and self-service functionality."

Key to the expansion strategy by Emirates is to ensure that the right infrastructure is in place to support growth, as Tim Clark, president at Emirates explained. "As the largest operator of A380s in the world, having a dedicated concourse that is built to exclusively accommodate this aircraft will transform the airport experience. It will mean an improved airport service, world class shopping and the first class and business class facilities for which Emirates is known and respected.

"We have had a very busy few months and together with Dubai Airports we continue our preparations for the opening and look forward to welcoming our first passengers to the new concourse in early 2013."

As the C3 project nears completion, work has already begun on phase one of the US\$7.8 billion strategic plan 2020, which will boost Dubai International's annual capacity to 98 million passengers by 2020 through several airport and airspace expansion projects.

As part of the plan, work to expand Terminal 2 to almost double its existing capacity continues apace, with construction well under way on the





**Dubai Airport continues its steady development to meet growth targets. Left: CEO Paul Griffiths: working closely with Emirates to meet expectations.**

new check-in facilities. Design work for the new Concourse 4, which will be dedicated to more than 110 international airlines, is also under way.

Current figures indicate that Dubai Airports' ambitious goals might just be achievable. For instance, during the first eight months of this year passenger traffic rose to 37.78 million, up by 15.4% compared to the previous year.

As C3 comes online, DXB will also begin full operations of its new smart e-Gate system at Terminal 3 from early January 2013. The new system is intended to allow passengers to quickly check in and out through passport control.

#### **Passport information**

According to the airport, the new system is capable of rapidly collecting passport information and capturing biometric data through a camera, after which it can compare the data with current records for any discrepancies.

Surface surveillance and other safety and security measures continue to be at the top of the agenda at most airport conferences and, as such, in June this year, Saab Sensis deployed its new surface multilateration system at the airport, the first application of the technology at DXB.

According to Saab Sensis, the multilateration system uses multiple low-maintenance, non-

rotating sensors to triangulate aircraft location based on transponder signals, providing air traffic controllers with precise aircraft position and identification information regardless of weather conditions.

Ken Kaminski, senior vice president and general manager at Saab Sensis explained that with a higher update rate and greater positional accuracy than traditional radar, the multilateration delivers effective surveillance for increased safety, capacity and efficiency of airspace and surface operations. He said by employing advanced processing techniques, a Saab Sensis multilateration system uses the minimal number of sensors for a less complex, lower lifecycle cost solution.

"Multilateration is a key component of an advanced surface movement guidance and control system (A-SMGCS), as it provides continually updated, all-weather surveillance. Saab Sensis multilateration, as is being used at Dubai International Airport, also supports automatic dependent surveillance - broadcast (ADS-B) for a system that works with today's equipage and is ready for tomorrow's avionics," said Kaminski.

He added that another benefit of the system is the ability to adapt and grow as the airport changes and be expanded into a wide-area multilateration

configuration for precision runway monitoring (PRM) or terminal airspace surveillance. "As with our systems being deployed in Saudi Arabia, multilateration is also a prime source of surveillance data for airport surface operations systems, such as Aerobahn. In addition to DXB, Saab Sensis is becoming the multilateration provider of choice in the Middle East with our technology being deployed at King Abdulaziz, King Fahad and Doha airports."

The airport's cargo facilities are also set to undergo a major modernisation and expansion programme as part of the overall growth strategy that will see airfreight capacity increased to more than three million tonnes by 2018.

#### **Annual capacity**

Based on the 2020 plan, construction will begin in the next few months on a 30,000sqm extension to the current Cargo Mega Terminal, increasing its annual capacity by 25% to 1.5 million tonnes.

Griffiths said Dubai Airports' total cargo volumes are expected to top four million tonnes by 2020 and an increasing portion of that growth is expected to spill-over to Dubai World Central (DWC) "The new infrastructure will not only increase our capacity but go a long way to simplifying what has become an increasingly complex cargo operation as the airport has grown," he added.

Cargo facilities Hall A and Freight Gate 1, next door, will get a complete refurbishment and then be dedicated for the sole use of Emirates SkyCargo – an operation that is becoming increasingly busy.

A new transshipment facility, with an annual capacity of 400,000 tonnes, will handle about 60% of the cargo transferred between DXB and DWC. The new facility will be built on the former site of the Airport Expo building, which was partially demolished earlier this year.

*When it comes to building a new airport or passenger terminal, the job is by no means done when construction is completed. One airport in Europe was so successful at achieving operational readiness that it has carved a niche in the market guiding others – particularly in the MENA region.*

**Alan Peaford** talked to the team at Munich Airport to get their top tips.

# MUNICH'S FIVE-STAR PLAN

The term ORAT (operational readiness and airport transfer) was conceived on May 17 1992 when Munich Airport shifted its entire operation seamlessly and smoothly overnight from its original location on the outskirts of the city centre to a greenfield site located 35 km away.

Munich Airport has since provided ORAT services to airports in numerous countries across the globe and has successfully supported the commissioning and opening of more than 20 airport facilities.

Along with its outstanding track record, Munich Airport has gained extensive knowledge and in-depth understanding of the requirements, challenges and risks of opening new airport facilities and has developed professional solutions to address these challenges.

While every project is unique in its environment, culture, scope and scale, the Munich team believes there are five major lessons learned that sum up the ORAT experience and can, in one way or another, be applied to all projects.

**1** Typically the prime areas of focus are the construction and design issues; less attention is given to operational processes, recruitment and training of staff and procurement of operational equipment.

The planning, construction and commissioning of an airport can take up to 30 years to complete. It is understandable that the focus of not only the client and contractors, but also the airport community and general public is centred on the new facilities and systems, the iconic architecture and the state-of-the-art technology.

Huge sums of the taxpayers or the private investors' funds flow into the project and people are curious to learn more about exactly what is being built. However, there will be a point in time when the facilities and systems are near completion and the focus of attention needs to concentrate on the operational processes; the numbers of staff needed and the quantity of equipment required to successfully run the airport and fulfil the promise of a high level of quality service to both passengers and the airport

community alike. Failure to achieve this goal will result in disappointment for both passengers and for the airport community, and a fabulous construction that does not reach its potential.

The timely implementation of an ORAT programme, where all airport stakeholders are actively involved in the processes of developing and aligning the airport's concept of operations and quality and service level agreements, sustainable manpower levels and detailed training and equipment procurement plans, is absolutely fundamental for resolving the huge challenges of operating and maintaining a new infrastructure.

**2** Close alignment of the construction programme with the operational stakeholders' readiness programme is required to ensure simultaneous availability of key staff, facilities and systems for training and proving trials before opening.

Most airport development projects are driven by extremely tight deadlines – either demand

already exceeds the capacity of the existing facilities or political changes or global events are driving governments to increase their infrastructure development. Despite this time pressure and the severe delay penalties associated with such projects, delays inevitably occur. However, this does not necessarily mean that the opening date is also postponed.

For this reason, it is vital that the construction programme is closely aligned with the stakeholders' own readiness programme for the recruitment and training of staff, the development of procedures and statutory documentation, aerodrome certification preparedness, execution of trial and transfer plans.

When construction is completed and handover has taken place, the stakeholders are usually left with a few months only to train hundreds, if not thousands, of staff in preparation for the transition to their new work environment. Applying an integrated ORAT approach, through which stakeholders are encouraged from the outset to actively participate in construction related activities, such as design and planning, testing and commissioning, O&M training, and operational handover, will result in the risk of failure being significantly reduced and the stakeholders better prepared for the new operation.

**3** Close alignment of concept of operations and standard operation procedures (SOP)s between all stakeholders is critical for a smooth start of operations.

Whether airport development takes place on a



greenfield site or is an extension of existing facilities and systems, shifting to the new environment requires a re-thinking of the operational strategy and the split of roles and responsibilities for airport operations and airport service providers within the airport community.

In preparation for the start of operations it is vital that all stakeholders align their concepts and achieve a clear understanding of “who will do what” by means of which facilities and systems and what interfaces need to be managed and in place for the day-to-day operation.

Who will issue the airport entry passes? Who will operate the passenger boarding bridges? Who will provide wheelchair services inside the terminal? Which role will the state authorities and government agencies be playing? These are only a few of the many questions that need to be answered.

Munich Airport consultants provide professional support, strategic advice, best practice approach and in-depth operational expertise to airport stakeholders so that they can develop a concept of operations and from this the essential standard operating procedures that will be tested and proven in the operational trials phase.

**4** Proper risk assessment and risk management, as well as a thorough follow-up of open issues identified during the trial phase, result in well planned contingency measures and a mitigation of any teething problems and failures.

Common sense and project management best practice demand an accurate and continuous risk

management in any airport development project. Implementing the Munich Airport ORAT methodology is in itself a risk mitigation measure.

An early and joint identification, assessment and documentation of risks leads to a comprehensive risk register for the airport stakeholder community that will be monitored, re-assessed and published on a monthly basis throughout the whole ORAT programme.

Munich consultants say they are now drawing from their experience in many other ORAT projects worldwide, which has enabled them to not only supply a list of typical risks but also proven mitigation measures to address them. But, they say, any risk management process is only as good as the willingness of senior airport management to plan, source and implement the mitigation measures.

“Many airport projects failed miserably because risks were not acknowledged, contingency budget was cut, and additional resources were not mobilised in time to minimise the impact of foreseeable risks.

In most cases, the risks had already become open issues that could well have been resolved if they had been escalated to the proper level,” the company said.

Towards the end of the project, trials are conducted during which consultants evaluate the readiness state of each stakeholder and each process. Potential snags are listed and ranked according to how critical they are for the airport opening. Some of these could be true “show stoppers” requiring immediate attention, others may be resolved through a work around, or through providing additional resources if and when it occurs.

Some issues, because of their lower priority, may even be put off until post opening, when the operation has settled in and any teething problems have been overcome.

A constant tracking of the airport readiness during the several months of trial operations will form the basis for a recommended opening date and a smooth start of operations.

**5** Internal and external stakeholders benefit from a timely decision regarding the opening methodology and an official announcement of the opening date.

Not all airports open on time; some airport openings have been postponed more than once and then take place almost unnoticeably by shifting traffic in a phased manner and a gentle “swing in” of the new operations. Others have opened overnight in a “big bang” operation where all traffic, staff and equipment is shifted within a couple of hours.

Regardless of the chosen approach, a timely and methodical opening strategy plays a vital role for the preparation of the stakeholders involved.

The timing of the opening should be decided together with the airport stakeholders based on flight schedules, peak patterns, logistics requirements, resource availability and the level of confidence in achieving the necessary targets across the airport community.

It is essential that all driving factors are analysed and alternative scenarios to plan, prepare and execute the airport transfer in a seamless manner are provided.

# RIZON JET - 1<sup>ST</sup> IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Thales' Stuart Dunleavy joins airline customers from LAN in reviewing the range of tablet connectivity.

# LOOK, NO HANDS...

*The annual technology show produced more than its fair share of electronic wizardry this year. Liz Moscrop went to play with the products.*

**F**rench avionics and in-flight entertainment and connectivity (IFEC) products manufacturer Thales gave a whole new meaning to 'lending a hand' at the recent Airline Passenger Experience (APEX) show in Long Beach California.

The OEM had a host of 'gesture control' technology on display, whereby users simply wave their hands to navigate through screens.

Aimed at premium class passengers in the first instance, the idea is that travellers can remain lying down while watching a movie, or avoid touching screens with their fingers.

The company's hands-off technology attracted a great deal of attention. This was quite a feat considering that APEX saw almost 2,500 attendees stream through its doors – its highest gate yet.

Exhibitors came from a wide range of disciplines, including education, encoding, entertainment, flight

crew services, in-flight entertainment and internet connectivity systems, in-flight lounge products and services, interactive content, IT, marketing, media, motion pictures, in-flight magazine publication, retail, seating, short subject production and distribution, software development and wireless communication.

Thales's cool room was seriously chilled. With both gesture and eye control screens on display, plus surround sound audio and wireless IFE, the manufacturer's booth was constantly packed.

The OEM also had plenty of good news for Middle East carriers. For example, Saudia Airlines opted for the firm as a key partner in its long-term transformation project. Saudia signed an agreement to install the Thales TopSeries system on 54 of its aircraft. This is a major step forward for both companies that introduces the award winning TopSeries AVANT

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system, TopConnect suite of connectivity and brand new TopSeries AVA, which adds wireless content streaming to the airline's future aircraft. AVANT is an android-based, next-generation system that combines the strengths of earlier platforms with advanced technologies, such as high definition video, solid-state drives and faster processors, to deliver an enhanced passenger experience.

This latest arrangement between Thales and Saudia covers A320, A330, B777 and 787 fleets. In addition, the airline is soon to deploy a new passenger interface that offers new capabilities and what it describes as "stunning visuals". The coordination and mutual commitment this project entails makes Thales one of the airline's key strategic partners in a long-term transformation of its brand.

Tarik Sindi, Saudia's vice president marketing and product management, said: "Passengers across the region are fast becoming extremely discerning and demand excellence from their in-cabin experience. Our goal is to take our place among the new breed of major global carriers for passenger satisfaction and customer service."

Thales in-flight entertainment business CEO Alan Pellegrini added: "In-flight entertainment systems can have a direct and lasting impact on passenger perceptions of an airline's service excellence, and carriers such as Saudia are now leading the world in designing and deploying the very best cabin experience."

**Latest evolution**

Thales also used APEX to announce that South American LAN Airlines would outfit one of its Airbus A320 aircraft with the newly-introduced TopSeries AVA system, starting in December this year.

The latest evolution in Thales' TopSeries product line allows passengers and crews to use their own wirelessly-enabled portable electronic devices to access rich content and applications resident on the Thales TopSeries head-end server via wireless access points in the cabin.

Additionally, early in 2013, LAN will start trialling Thales's GateSync system – a secure ground network for aircraft communications and content loading. GateSync uses Wi-Fi (802.11), WiMax (802.16) and GSM connectivity frequencies and can stream content and data across all three networks simultaneously or individually.

Android users will be able to download an app plug-in once in the air in order to access this content. However, for digital rights management reasons, passengers using iPads will be directed to download an app before they get on the aircraft. This will give them full access to the rich content, including movies. Those without the app will have web-browser access to a lot of the on-board content, but not encrypted movies.

Another huge story that will impact the IFEC industry worldwide was the Thales announcement that it is to partner with



CEO Alan Pellegrini says IFE makes a lasting impact on passengers.

Honeywell to bring next-generation broadband connectivity to the global aviation market.

The two aerospace companies are working to integrate the Honeywell-developed GX aviation Ka-band satcom avionics and antenna systems, operating over Inmarsat's GX aviation Ka-band satellite constellation with Thales's cabin network solutions.

The combined offering will give commercial airline operators and their passengers four times the in-flight connectivity bandwidth available today, enabling real-time TV channel viewing and social media connectivity, as well as virtual office functionality for video conferencing.

Jack Jacobs, vice president, Honeywell, said: "Inmarsat's GX aviation Ka-band satellite connectivity system is a game changer. We expect it will provide airlines with significantly larger bandwidth at a cost-effective price."

Stuart Dunleavy, Thales Avionics, VP of media and connectivity, added: "GX aviation satellite constellation provides huge volumes of bandwidth and is optimised for mobile platforms, which guarantee seamless satellite handover and global systems management."

He said that a fully certified and reliable end-to-end solution for both passenger communications

(cellular, internet, intranet, streaming media) and e-enabled aircraft solutions (aircraft health monitoring, two-way messaging and progressive monitoring) would be critical to meeting both airlines' and passengers' expectations.

DigEcor, the manufacturer of the low-cost portable IFE solution digEplayer L7 and L10, also introduced several new future products and developments, ranging from wireless streaming, a ruggedised Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 10.1 with spare battery attached, to an embedded IFE solution using its existing products.

**Streaming system**

The wireless streaming system is expected to roll out soon, although no launch partners have been announced to date.

After initial trials of a partially embedded IFE solution with Gulf Air, the national carrier of the kingdom of Bahrain, digEcor is ready to move into the fully embedded market. The firm is working with undisclosed partners to bring the solution to market, and says the system will be available in the first quarter of 2013.

Gulf Air also announced that it had selected AMP International (AMP), a division of the Post Modern Group, to provide content management





**Advanced seat back technology for Saudia.**

services for its fleet. Under the terms of the agreement, AMP will be responsible for programming for all systems from January 2013.

Amir Samnani, Post Modern Group’s COO, said: “Our employees in our Middle East offices, as well as in Irvine, California, look forward to assisting the Gulf Air team in the continuous development of their in-flight passenger entertainment experience.”

Gulf Air operates a fleet of 39 aircraft to 48 cities across 30 countries from Europe to Asia and boasts the largest network in the Middle East. The company recently became the first airline in the world to offer full on-board connectivity to passengers. Meanwhile, Alawar Entertainment announced that its games are now available on Panasonic Avionics Corporation’s in-flight entertainment systems.

Airlines operating select aircraft with compatible in-flight entertainment systems from Panasonic can now offer titles such as Treasures of Montezuma, Farm Frenzy and Hotel Mogul, from Alawar’s broad portfolio of industry leading games.

Dmitry Tarasov, who is Alawar Entertainment game channels development director, said: “Cooperation with Panasonic and FlightBet/Ensemble Media gives us an opportunity

to enter a new market niche for casual games – in-flight entertainment.”

Dubai-based Spitfire Creative Content had an interesting proposition for the industry. A pioneer of “augmented reality” (AR) in marketing, co-founder Brian Shepherd has worked in the media industry since 1985. He has several prestigious jobs under his belt, such as Madonna’s “Frozen” video, the highly acclaimed Guinness adverts and a Hollywood coup with “Gladiator”, which earned an Oscar for best visual effects.

**Industry buzzword**

AR is the latest industry buzzword. It is a live, direct or indirect, view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are augmented by computer-generated sensory input such as sound, video, graphics or GPS data – like that used in moving maps.

As a result, the technology functions by enhancing your current perception of reality, as opposed to virtual reality, which replaces the real world with a simulated one. Augmentation is conventionally in real-time and in context with environmental elements, such as using your mobile phone to scan over a print advert to call up a web page.

Spitfire recently worked with Emirates to create an in-flight video using both computer-generated imagery and actors. Shepherd said: “Making a unique film such as this involved several challenges. The one that really stood out was how to cover such a wide range of subjects – information, communication and entertainment in a very short space of time. The solution was to combine a small amount of live action with a lot of animation.”

From show-stopping projects from the likes of Thales and Panasonic, to smaller niche ideas, APEX is the best place to see what will shape the industry for the coming year. It is also the venue for the coveted annual Passenger Choice Awards.

Airlines and service providers receive awards in 14 categories, ranging from best in-flight video to best ground experience, with Virgin America and Emirates receiving the top accolades this time: Best Overall Passenger Experience (up to 50 IFE equipped in fleet) and Best Overall Passenger Experience (over 50 IFE equipped in fleet) respectively.

Next year’s show will be in Anaheim. Given it wowed visitors with gesture control this year, we have to wonder what Thales has up its sleeve for 2013?

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*There's one area of an aircraft that receives a greater footfall than any other during a flight...the bathroom.*

**Kelly Green** visited one aircraft interiors company to find out why it has decided to give aircraft lavatories the VIP treatment.



**Stylish design has Mac Interiors flushed with success.**



# Lav is in the air...

**U**K-based MacCarthy Aviation has carved itself a niche in the aircraft interiors market over recent years, applying its expertise in VIP interiors to aircraft lavatory upgrades.

"Refurbishing and upgrading aircraft lavatories is a speciality of ours, particularly for Airbus and Boeing aircraft," said Phil Francis, sales and marketing director at MacCarthy.

"Over the last 12 months we have upgraded business class and economy class lavatories for Air Astana, Brussels Airlines, Sri Lankan Airlines and Transaero for A330, A340, B737 and B767 aircraft and supplied uplift kits for numerous customers for A320 aircraft, particularly our Beresford range of Corian worktops."

MacCarthy, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, is no stranger to the Middle East market.

Having already made a name for itself with a number of VIP clients in the region, earlier this year it announced it had won a significant

contract, worth in excess of £4 million, to supply lavatory upgrade kits and galley refurbishment kits to an unnamed Middle Eastern airline.

"The lavatory kits we are supplying underpins the significant investment our customer is making in upgrading their cabins for their fleet of more than 30 Airbus aircraft," said Francis. "We won the contract on the back of exhibiting at Aircraft Interiors Expo 2012 in Hamburg, where we showcased a concept lavatory, so things have moved extremely quickly since then.

#### **Lighting package**

"The kits include a new LED lighting package, Corian worktop with stainless steel sink, soft close toilet seat, floor pan and mat, faucet, amenity stowage basket and vanity cabinet door, which will be manufactured and kitted at our facility near Gatwick Airport, UK."

Of course, lavatory upgrades are not the only string to MacCarthy's bow. The small British company, which employs around 96 staff and has an annual turnover in excess of £8 million, has

built up an extensive repertoire in the aircraft interiors arena, including bespoke stowages, galleys, seats, bulkheads and VIP interiors.

"When Richard Branson launched Virgin Atlantic we manufactured the upper class bar, which was a first for transatlantic flights in first class," explained Graham Hutchins, marketing manager at MacCarthy.

"Today we manufacture and repair infant cradles as well – that's unique to us," said Hutchins. "The baby cradles attach to the bulkhead of aircraft and our customers include Emirates, Qatar and Virgin.

"We are EASA Part 21 G & J approved, so that means we can design and manufacture aviation-related products, so we don't have to get them designed elsewhere, we have the capabilities all in-house. We have Part 145 approval, so we are a maintenance and repair facility. Getting all those three approvals is no mean feat and we're unique in that way, being a small company.

"We are a one-stop shop."

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Having built up a long list of capabilities and products, the company focus has shifted in the past couple of years and, as a result, MacCarthy has seen its business grow significantly.

“Our focus is on commercial airlines. It’s a bigger market, there are less people doing what we do and we’ve seen a real growth in our business,” said Hutchins.

“Over the years we’ve done a lot of VIP work, especially in the Middle East,” explained Francis. “We’ve done work for the Bahraini Royal Flight, Dubai Air Wing, Bahraini Defence Force VIP aircraft, Saudi Special Flight. We’re currently working with JorAMCo in Jordan on a project there, doing a major VIP upgrade on an A310 for a Middle Eastern customer, introducing new cabins and new bulkheads, and in-flight entertainment.

“But we took the view a couple of years ago that we needed to re-engage with the airline market, so now our balance is 80% airlines, 20% VIP, whereas two or three years ago it was the other way round.

“The way we’ve achieved that is by identifying that lavatory upgrades are a perennial requirement, because they need doing regularly, and we are very, very good at them.”

According to Francis, there are three things that travellers judge an aircraft on – the seat, the food and the bathroom. “Most airlines will put a



**Middle East based business jet interiors have also benefitted from the big Mac treatment.**

massive effort into the seat and the general cabin environment, and they will put as much as they can afford into the food, and the IFE of course. Then the only thing left is the toilet, which has been overlooked quite a bit for some considerable time, but we’ve experienced quite a lot of interest in lavatory upgrades,” he said.

“We don’t just refurbish what’s there; we remodel the environment. We put in corian worktops, we put in LED lighting, we change the configuration, we change the facilities to make them nicer, we improve amenity stowages, we change the worktops and sinks.

“We deliver a really, really nice product that is remodelled rather than refurbished but within the confines of weight, space, flammability, functionality, and we are very successful at it because we keep winning projects for lavatories.”

As new aircraft models enter the marketplace and more airlines look to upgrade their fleets, MacCarthy’s success looks set to continue.

“The future is looking quite good,” said Hutchins.

“The Middle East is certainly a big area of opportunity for us. You see the likes of Qatar and Emirates upgrading their fleets and buying new aircraft. As the old aircraft become available, they all need work doing to them – that’s our market and that’s who we’re targeting so it’s a good time to be in this industry.”

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# New players change Middle East landscape

*UAV development in the Middle East has long been dominated by Israeli technology but the picture is changing as a number of nations begin to channel investment into maturing their own domestic UAV development and manufacturing capabilities.*

**Claire Apthorp**  
*reports.*

**S**overeign UAV technology is an attractive prospect for any national defence industry adding, as it does, a compelling set of capabilities to national security interests.

The impact of these capabilities is, perhaps, more loaded in a region where tensions remain high and sensitivity along land borders is a primary concern.

Turkey has seen a long history of partnership with Israel for its domestic market, which has enabled the nation to develop advanced defence manufacturing capabilities of its own.

A handful of companies are working within this market, including Baykar Makina with its Bayraktar mini UAV, Bayraktar tactical UAV, and Malazgirt mini VTOL system (all in production); and Vestel with its Efe target acquisition system (demonstrated to potential Turkish customers), and Karayel target acquisition, target location and target designation system currently in production.

In addition to the R-10E VTOL (with one hour endurance, 500m maximum altitude and 16km LOS communications), and R-300 VTOL (with 4hr endurance, 3,650m ceiling and 100km LOS communications), TAI-TUSAS Aerospace Industries is producing the most noteworthy UAV programme in the region with the Anka medium altitude long endurance (MALE) UAV.

First unveiled at the Farnborough Air Show in 2010, Anka is being developed for the Turkish Armed Forces. At that stage, three aircraft and one ground control station had been purchased by the Turkish Air Force (TAF), although the system was yet to conduct its maiden voyage, which took place in December 2010.

The system has a length of 8m, wingspan of 17m and

is designed for day and night, all-weather ISR mission capabilities with EO/IR/LD/LRF and SAR/ISAR/GMTI payloads. With an endurance of 24 hours and maximum altitude of 30,000ft, the UAV also features fixed or moving target tracking capability, ATC radio relay over datalink, on-board data recording capability, and potential capabilities including SATCOM, SIGINT & communications relay.

Developed to replace the Elbit System Heron MALE UAV in service with the Turkish Armed Forces, the Turkish government only confirmed in January this year that it would be purchasing the system, when it was announced that 10 units would be procured; and the company has since revealed that it has its sights set on the international market, with possible customers said to include Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar.

It will be interesting to see what kind of impact Turkish technology will have on the international MALE UAV market. In 2011 at the Dubai Air Show, UAE company Adcom revealed that it also has designs on this market, with the unveiling of a full-scale model of its United 40 MALE UAV, designed for strategic missions, with a maximum take-off weight of 1,000kg, payload capacity of 200-400kg, endurance of 25hrs and ceiling altitude of 7,000m.

With an s-shaped fuselage, similar to that of the earlier Smart-Eye 1 UAV, the system has a tandem-wing design and flexible payload of two gimbaled camera platforms, and four pods located under wings, each with a 100kg weight capability. It also has the potential to be weaponised.

Adcom has developed a number of other systems of varying size and sophistication, including the Yabhon-M, -R, -R2, -RX and -Smart Eye, designed to perform a range of ISR, border control and remote area monitoring missions.

The expansion of domestic production capabilities within the Middle East will only increase as manufacturers gain confidence and their platforms mature and attract international customers.

The impact this development will have on the control of technology within the region remains to be seen. As countries that currently don't have access to Israeli- and US-built technology begin to develop and improve their own, and find themselves with new markets opening up to them, the current balance is likely to shift. This was most recently demonstrated by the downing of a UAV of unknown origin in Israeli airspace in early October; it shows that not only is there more happening within UAV development in the region than meets the eye, that development is in some areas far more advanced than expected.



TAI's Anka: selected by the Turkish Air Force.

*The world's largest networking event for airlines and airports took place in Abu Dhabi in October.*

*Alan Peaford was there.*

# Record Routes plots flightpath to future growth

**W**hen the World Routes forum last visited Abu Dhabi in 1996 it was modest affair. Held in the downtown Hilton Hotel there was just a small group of route development professionals meeting a handful of airports.

In October, the circus returned to town – the first time World Routes has ever been in the same city twice – and this time there was almost 3,000 officials from more than 300 airlines, 750 airports and governments, tourism boards and suppliers from all over the world.

Sabre – which was celebrating the implementation of its multi-million dollar deal with Etihad – said the event was vital as it met airlines and airports interested in the new systems being utilised in the region.

Indeed, the record attendance at the show said as much about the reputation that the Gulf now has as a global hub as it did about the slickness of the event, which next year moves to Las Vegas.

## Commercial strategy

There were packed exhibition halls with national tourism boards and airports aiming to attract the wandering airline route developers; inside the halls there were conference rooms where airlines outlined their commercial strategy – and alongside it all there was world aviation summit taking place with keynote speeches from leading industry stars, including Abdul Wahab Taffaha from the Arab Air Carriers, and top specialists from the region's airlines, airports and aviation authorities.

For James Bennett, CEO of the host Abu Dhabi Airport Company, it was a vital part of his mission – to promote the UAE capital airport as a hub.

“By actually coming here and seeing it for themselves, airlines and other delegates really get the chance to see what we are all about here. I know they are impressed by the scale of what we are doing. This is an important event for us – and particularly so as we are hosting it.”

Speaking at the official opening David Stroud, Routes' executive vice president, backed Bennett's



view. “This year's World Routes might well be the largest commercial aviation event ever held and it is more than appropriate that it takes place in the Middle East, the fastest growing aviation market in the world,” he said. “The event demonstrates in an impressive way how dynamic the global aviation sector is, despite the challenging economic and regulatory environment.”

There was a record number of 40 airline CEOs who came from as far as South America to meet an incredible 250 airport chief executives.

At the heart of the event are the tightly-scheduled face-to-face discussions with the aim to agree on new air services.

In total, around 16,000 meetings took place in Abu Dhabi over the three days. Unsurprisingly quite a number featured the Middle East carriers and airlines around the world that want to be part of the growth success story.

ADAC's chairman, Ali Majed Al Mansoori, was unsurprised by this interest. “The Middle East region has registered a 17.3% growth in passenger



traffic in the first eight months of 2012, as per the traffic report released by IATA, becoming the fastest growing region in the world. The aviation sector is one of the 12 sectors that form the Emirates' engines of economic, social and cultural growth and diversification,” he said.

“Our leaders' recognition that this sector is essential for connecting the emirate to the world has been translated to significant investment in air transport, enabling Abu Dhabi International Airport to become one of the fastest growing international airport hubs. This commitment has also allowed Abu Dhabi to establish itself as a global centre for tourism, trade and industry in the 16 years since it last hosted the World Route Development Forum.”

Tourism boards brought out their star players to help boost attention.

With the UAE developing a cricket reputation with fine stadia and the base for the International Cricket Council (and, indeed, Pakistan) it was no surprise that the West Indies – and Trinidad &





Far left: Ras Al Khaimah opened with royal presence.  
 Centre: The event created global buzz.  
 Top: The hosts ADAC represented by CEO Jim Bennett and above Etihad CEO, James Hogan

Tobago in particular – created a storm of interest when their tourism ambassador, the legendary world-record breaking batsman Brian Lara, took to the stand.

Other stars, of course, included Etihad president James Hogan, who was happy to talk about both his airline’s deal with Virgin Australia and rival Emirates’ move to link with Qantas. “The great thing is that more people now know there is an alternative to the Asian hubs out of that market – and that is good for all of us in the Gulf.”

Malaysia’s Kuala Lumpur and Singapore’s Changi Airport were both at Abu Dhabi to fight back, demonstrating that their facilities offered different options. “Only Air AsiaX and MAS operate to Australia from Malaysia – there are opportunities,” the airport’s general manager, Mohammed Mah Sah, said.

Qatar Airways CEO Akbar Al Baker was another to enjoy a walk around the show – stopping off to look at the plans for Abu Dhabi’s

new midfield terminal – his own new airport at Doha is facing delays.

Delays were also on his mind for the airline as he took the opportunity to take a swipe at manufacturer Boeing for the delay to the delivery of his B787 Dreamliners, which he considered essential to the next stage of Qatar’s route development.

**Positive news**

There was some real positive news for Qatar at the show though.

MasFlight, the operations data analysis partner of OAG, reported at Routes that its research showed Qatar Airways leads the Middle East’s three super carriers in on-time performance, while Emirates maintains its advantage on network scale and destinations served.

MasFlight CEO Josh Marks said: “Emirates, Qatar and Etihad are all still in the infancy of their network expansion and the competition they present to airline alliances is increasing. The key route expansion opportunities for Gulf carriers are

with the United States, overflying European hubs. We can, therefore, expect to see an accelerating ‘land grab’ by Middle East airlines, especially for neutral airports like Boston’s Logan International, and for US hubs with a European focus, such as Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County, Miami International and Philadelphia International.”

MasFlight’s analysis also looked at alliances and showed that oneworld – Qatar was being tipped as a potential member – needs to add member airlines to compete effectively with Star Alliance and SkyTeam. “Star Alliance has by far the greatest network reach, with top coverage across the 1,000 major global markets. In contrast, SkyTeam’s strength is efficiency: its strong, centralised hubs give the alliance great geographic reach through fewer flights than Star. Trailing the pack is oneworld, which, while competitive in key cities and market pairs, needs new members to increase its coverage globally.”

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## Women pilots get the Jordan experience

*With Middle East airlines increasingly recognising the value that female pilots can bring to them it is no wonder that the group supporting women pilots in the region is growing.*

**Alan Peaford reports.**

**W**omen in aviation are still a minority group in the region but the numbers are growing. In early September the Arabian Section of the famed 99s – the international women pilots group – held its first whole regional gathering in Jordan.

Arranged by the group's governor, Alia Twal, the lady pilots travelled for a wonderful flying experience in the Jordanian skies and for an opportunity to network and share views about the role of female pilots in the region.

"It was an epic meeting this year over the Jordanian skies for the first time ever," Twal said.

"The Arabian section currently has more than 30 members and is growing. This meeting was set to mark their spot on the Arabian map as an empowered team. Gathering all the female pilots out of their extensive schedules across a geographical area that stretches from Lebanon down to Oman was not an easy task."

The participants represented a broad spectrum of airline pilots, private aircraft and glider pilots, who all operate in the region.

And the group – Alia Twal, Yvonne Trueman, Captain Carol Rabadi, Captain Vanessa Umba, Samar Oran, Teressa Quemada, Adelle Nahhas, Hadeel Khamash, Li Yan, and Houda Matar – got the chance to try out different flying experiences in Jordan, as well as experiencing what the country has to offer from natural beauty, brilliant weather, wealth of history and character and generous hospitality.

The adventure started in Amman, where the group met the association's sponsors and enjoyed the jet flight simulators at Jordan

Airline Training Simulation (JATS) before visiting the magical desert beauty of Wadi Rum, where they went up in a hot air balloon and enjoyed a serene experience before flying micro-lights.

In Aqaba, hosted by Ayla Aviation Academy and Royal Aerosport Club of Jordan, the ladies enjoyed flying over the Red Sea in the single engine DA40 and the ultra-light aircraft. They also toured the Dead Sea and Petra.

The group welcomed two new recruits – Samar Oran, only the second female pilot in the history of Jordan and the first Arab Muslim female pilot to cross the Atlantic; and Houda Matar, a Lebanese pilot who has just successfully secured her commercial instrument rated licence.

"We are now looking forward to make this an annual meeting," Twal said.

A number of the region's aerospace companies were involved in sponsoring the landmark meeting in order to promote the need for more women to join the industry. They

included: Royal Jordanian Airlines, DHL, Gulf Air, Jordan Airline Training and Simulation, Royal Aero Sport of Jordan, Ayla Aviation Academy, Mideast Aviation Academy, Bait Ali Lodge and Marriott Dead Sea Resort.

The 99s was formed in 1929 by the legendary Amelia Earhart, who called a meeting in New York and 99 lady pilots turned up – hence the name.

There are now more than 5,000 members in 35 countries ranging from micro light pilots to astronauts.

Anyone wanting details of the 99s or related flying enquiries should contact: [Aliatwal@hotmail.com](mailto:Aliatwal@hotmail.com)



A new form of flying for most of the 99ers.

## Commercial head for Turkish Technic

Turkish Technic, the MRO subsidiary of Turkish Airlines, has appointed Altan Büyükyılmaz as executive vice president (commercial affairs) succeeding Dr Fuat Oktay, who becomes a member of Turkish Technic's board.

Prior to his new position, Büyükyılmaz was the CEO of BH Airlines and before that the VP of sales and marketing at Turkish Airlines.

## Strata names Al-Olama as CEO

Strata Manufacturing, Mubadala Aerospace's advanced composite aerostructures manufacturing facility based in Al Ain, has appointed Badr Al-Olama as CEO.

Al-Olama, a UAE national, has served as a deputy CEO of Strata since April 2011.

## Omani cabin crew join Etihad

Etihad Airways has welcomed a new group of 15 Omani cabin crew as part of its extensive recruitment drive in Oman.

This brings the total number of Omani cabin crew in Etihad Airways to 63.

They join a growing number of Omani nationals that is expected to reach 400 in 2012 in positions that span the spectrum of the airline's operations.

## MENA Aerospace jigs management

MENA Aerospace Enterprises of Bahrain has undertaken a number of key management appointments in order to support the corporate group's sustained growth and regional expansion.

## BOEING APPOINTS CHRIS SMITH AS MD FOR DEFENCE IN SAUDI ARABIA

**Boeing has named Chris Smith as vice president and managing director for its defence business in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia to further strengthen customer relationships and establish new in-country partnerships.**

**Smith will be based in Riyadh and will focus on ensuring that the best of Boeing and industry are brought to support the kingdom's defence and security needs. He will report to Chris Raymond, vice president of business development and strategy for Boeing Defense, Space & Security (BDS).**

**Previously, Smith served as director of strategic alliances for BDS's global services & support business, where he developed strategies and business cases to guide new pursuits, investments and teaming. Smith joined Boeing in 2001 after serving 20 years in the Royal Australian Navy.**



The group has seen dramatic increases in demand for its aviation and aircraft-related services within the region, and as a result is re-aligning its key management to focus on developing markets and industry sectors on a regional basis.

Ralph Eisenschmid, MENA Aerospace Enterprises' chief executive officer, has been appointed to the role of executive director on the company's board of directors. Eisenschmid has been part of the MENA Aerospace management team since the company's founding in 2004.

Omar Mattar, general manager, has been promoted to CEO responsible for all divisions and operations in Bahrain. Mattar joined MENA Aerospace as an adviser in March 2011 and was subsequently appointed as its general manager two months later.

Khalid Albinfalal has been appointed to the role of general manager of SA MENA Avionics WLL, MENA Aerospace's aircraft avionics installation and repair division.

## Lineveldt promoted to key Gama role

Richard Lineveldt has been appointed general manager of Sharjah's Gama Aviation, with the task of implementing its growth strategy throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

Prior to joining Gama in 2008 to establish the company's Middle East operations department he gained significant experience in a number of aviation operations roles around the world.

## Hansen gets another five years

Lufthansa Systems AG has announced that the company's supervisory board has extended the appointment of CEO Stefan Hansen by five years until June 30 2018.

This decision, taken ahead of time, ensures continuity at the top of Lufthansa Systems.

The supervisory board elected Simone Menne, chief financial officer of Deutsche Lufthansa AG, its chairperson effective immediately.

Hansen has been CEO &

chairman of the executive board of Lufthansa Systems AG since July 1 2010.

## New top man for EgyptAir

EgyptAir has appointed a new chairman and CEO for its airline.

Captain Roshdy Zakaria was named as the new head of the airline, having spent 30 years at EgyptAir in key positions such as chief pilot examiner and instructor on A300-B4, B767 and B777.

He also held the position of deputy VP flight operation.

## Oman Air adds to UK team

Oman Air has appointed Jamal Al Azki to the newly-created position of assistant country manager for the UK and Ireland. He will be based at the company's UK office in Chiswick, London, and will report to country manager Rohan Alce.

Al Azki was previously Oman Air's district sales manager for the Sultanate of Oman, based in Muscat, where he started his career in 2009.

## Altan takes on Turkish Technic role

Turkish Technic, the MRO subsidiary of Turkish Airlines, has appointed Altan Büyükyılmaz as executive vice president (Commercial Affairs) succeeding Dr. Fuat Oktay, who becomes a member of Turkish Technic's board of directors.

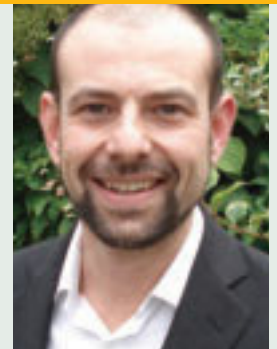
Prior to his new position, Büyükyılmaz was CEO of BH Airlines and before that, the VP of sales and marketing at Turkish Airlines.

He takes over at a key time in Turkish Technic's development as it will be completing the first phase of its new MRO complex project before the end of this year. This investment will enable it to double its capability.

## GUY SNELGAR APPOINTED GETTHERE MD IN EMEA

**Sabre has promoted Guy Snelgar to managing director of its GetThere business in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA).**

**He steps up from the role of business development manager and will now oversee GetThere's sales, service and operations across the EMEA region from Sabre's EMEA headquarters office in London.**



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## Xavier Hery

**Alan Peaford** talks to *Xavier Hery*, general manager for Shell Aviation in the Middle East and South Africa.



1

■ What is your background and how did you get involved in the aviation field?

I have worked for almost 20 years in the oil industry with Mobil, BP and for the past four years with Shell.

I started in fuel retailing in France but in 2003 in London I came across the aviation field as my team's responsibility included sourcing and supplying jet fuel to its aviation business. When I joined Shell in 2006 I led several strategic initiatives and projects for a variety of functional and business teams globally, including Shell Aviation. This was a natural progression for me to join in the aviation business in one of the fastest growing regions in the world.

2

■ What does a typical day involve?

There is no such thing as a typical day!

My role entails ensuring the safe and smooth running of Shell's aviation business across seven countries to enable our customers to get the very best service and products when and where they want them.

To do this, I manage a very varied and skilled workforce that includes experts in sales, marketing, operations, technical services, product quality and supply and distribution. Safety is firmly on my mind when it comes to everything we do. No incident, no harm to people – be it our staff or customers – and no damage to the environment is absolutely critical to our sustained success.

So, a full day might be dedicated to safety training and inspecting airport operations; another day, the focus would be on visiting customers and airport authorities, meeting with industry stakeholders focusing on how we can continue to successfully serve an industry in which Shell has been present for more than 100 years. Engaging with staff is also high on my agenda as an important part of my role is to encourage them to be as successful as possible. On a more personal note, a typical day would involve some physical activity, as I want to be ready for the Abu Dhabi triathlon in March 2013. Running and cycling around will be a great way to discover Dubai and the region!

3

■ What do you see as the greatest challenge you have faced in your career?

My greatest personal challenge has been to continuously adapt to new businesses circumstances, diverse sets of people and to new geographies. These experiences taught me to deal with the unexpected.

One specific example was when hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the USA in the summer of 2005, causing severe destruction from central Florida to Texas. All of a sudden, a large part of the refining and storage infrastructure was not available. We were able to secure supply only because the team showed resilience, creativity and flexibility. These qualities are still very much required today, as supply security remains a key priority in the airline industry.

4

■ The price of fuel is seen as one of the big issues for the aviation industry – as a leading fuel supplier how do you view this issue?

We, of course, recognise that volatility in jet fuel prices brings challenges to our customers.

This volatility can significantly affect profits, cash flow and operations in the aviation sector. In order to help with this, we can offer services such as price risk management tools for our customers to help them manage costs in times of fluctuating fuel prices.

5

■ The airport and aviation industry in the MENA region is expanding. How do you see Shell Middle East developing alongside this growth?

Shell has a long history in the Middle East.

The region is, of course, a very important market for us, especially as it continues to display solid growth potential against more mature markets like Europe and the Americas.

We work closely with our customers here to offer quality fuel and lubricants, our world-class expertise, leading technology and aviation fuelling best practices. It is my job to ensure that the demands of our customers in this region are met to the highest standards and delivered in a safe and hassle-free way.

We also regularly engage with airport authorities and civil aviation entities to promote open and transparent access to supply infrastructure, leading to healthy and sustainable levels of competition benefiting the travelling passengers.



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