

Dassault wins Indian LCA contract

BANGALORE

Dassault-Breguet has been selected to assist the Indian Aeronautical Development Authority (IADA) in the design and manufacture of a new Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) with the prototype's first flight scheduled in 1990. An official statement is expected soon.

Thirty top-flight engineers from Dassault-Breguet are due in India shortly to act as technical advisers to IADA in charge of the LCA programme. The aircraft, currently in the project definition stage, is to be a single-seat single-engine design with a 23,000lb maximum takeoff weight and a delta-wing layout. Service entry of the 12.5 tonne air superiority/ground attack LCA is targeted for 1994, with about 200 required to replace the MiG-21 Fishbeds and HAL Ajeets in the Indian Air Force.

The Indian government has been seeking technical assistance from American and European manufacturers for the LCA programme, and a fierce competition has raged among Lockheed, Grumman and Northrop as well as British Aerospace, MBB, Dornier, and Dassault-Breguet. Finally, Dassault-Breguet was chosen for the LCA programme and won a \$100 million technical co-operation contract with India's Aeronautical Development Authority.

Dassault-Breguet will assist the Indians in the design and systems integration of the aircraft. LCA prototypes will be powered by General Electric F404 engines. The first of 11 GE F404-F2J3 turbofans purchased from the United States in 1986 was delivered earlier this year in preparation for the prototype's first flight.

But the French are hoping that the Indian government will, in due course, adopt



Martin Marietta shows Pathfinder pylon

Martin Marietta's Pathfinder is being demonstrated on an LTV YA-7E Corsair. The Pathfinder is derived from the company's Lantirn pod but is built into a pylon, rather than being a discrete pod, to preserve a stores station. Pathfinder weighs 200lb and provides a Flir picture on the pilot's Hud. The system will be tested on a General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon later this year

Snecma's new M88 MkII fighter engine now under development for the Dassault-Breguet Rafale combat aircraft. The LCA's multi-function radar will be designed and developed by an Indian electronics company and produced in India.

Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) is going ahead with plans for the production of the LCA which will have composite structures and fly-by-wire control systems.

The French-Indian LCA technical co-operation agreement in no way prejudices the decision which the New Delhi Government is due to take early next year on the selection of a trainer and tactical support aircraft to be purchased abroad and later assembled in India.

The British Aerospace Hawk and the Dassault-Breguet/Dornier Alpha Jet are competing for this programme. The Indian Government needs 83 such aircraft — 75 for the Indian Air Force and eight for the Indian Navy.

Following up its LCA success, Dassault-Breguet is going all out to win the trainer deal, too. This latest Indian contract comes as a shot in the arm for Dassault-Breguet which is going through a period of great economic turbulence at home.

Lauda wins routes battle

VIENNA

Former racing driver Niki Lauda has won his 16-month battle to become the first Austrian independent airline operator to fly scheduled international services.

Lauda, who retired from Grand Prix racing to set up Lauda Air, took out a court order to force the Austrian Government to reach a decision on his route applications by last Friday after waiting for more than a year without a reply.

Despite objections from the State carrier, Austrian Airlines, Lauda has been granted a licence to fly from Vienna to Melbourne and Sydney, via Bangkok. An application to serve Beijing was rejected. Lauda Air currently operates two Boeing 737s on tourist charter to Mediterranean resorts, and last year made a profit of AS31.6 million (\$2.5 million).

Lauda himself pilots many of the flights, and intends to convert to the Boeing 767-300ERs he has ordered for the Australian routes. He tells *Flight* "I'm going to Seattle in January to take the

course and they deliver the first 767 on April 25". A second 767 is on order for 1989. The weekly service starts on April 29 and Lauda believes there will be "no problem" making the route pay. "We are going to start an extensive television advertising campaign. We only need 180 people a week to break even".

Lauda intends using two pilots and nine cabin attendants on the 21hr flight, and the pilots' union has expressed concern over the long duty hours expected (*Flight*, August 29, page 4). But Lauda discounts this: "The hours won't be too long. We will get fresh crews in Bangkok like everyone else".

Lauda may vary the Australian route via Hong Kong, and once he has the second 767-300 in 1989 is thinking about applying for scheduled routes to South America. But he says "First we have to get this one in the air, then we will start thinking about other services".

The airline was originally set up in 1979, but was relaunched in 1985, shortly before Lauda's second retirement.