

Avro RJX closer to launch

Although it has avoided saying the RJX project is launched, British Aerospace is expected to announce orders from several European airlines before the end of 1999.

British Aerospace (BAe) has avoided saying that its RJX project has been launched, but rather gave a 'programme review' of it at the European Regional Airlines assembly.

Engineering work continues on schedule for first customer delivery in June 2001. The first two development aircraft have been identified as serial numbers 376 and 378, the first an RJX85 and the second an RJX100. With the completion of the outstanding 15 Avro RJ orders and approximately 10 further LF507 powered aircraft, all deliveries will be RJXs. BAe says the RJX is expected to enter service in July 2001.

BAe has still not been able to sign up a launch customer, but is confident of having one or two before the end of 1999. Likely candidates are Aer Lingus, Eurowings and Meridiana. Orders outside Europe are seen as less likely in the short term.

The USA is still too scope clause limited and Air Wisconsin appears to have gone cold on replacing its existing aircraft. Sales to Qantas, which has a fleet of twelve 146s operated by National Jet Systems as Airlink, is facing opposition from within British Aerospace Asset Management which leases Qantas/NJS most of the existing aircraft.

CRJ Series 900

The future for Bombardier's BRJ-X project has to be seen as less secure following the announcement that the company is investigating a stretched 90-seat derivative of the CRJ Series 700.

This aircraft could be delivered from as early as 2002, two years ahead of the BRJ-X and its competitors. It would retain the same engines as the CRJ 700.

As well as lower development costs, the competition faced by this aircraft is substantially reduced. By limiting the capacity of the aircraft to 90 seats, Bombardier has avoided the A318 and 717 market. Bombardier could still offer the BRJ-X with 108 seats.

Bombardier acknowledges that the principal market for the 90-seater will be in Europe. Much of this will be as a replacement for Avro RJ/BAe 146 and Fokker 70/100 aircraft.

The CRJ has been very successful as a turboprop replacement in Europe, where its speed has overcome the disadvantages of a small cabin.

As an Avro RJ/BAe 146 or Fokker 70/100 replacement, the CRJ 900 will have less cabin room. Operators are expected to lose the CRJ's flexibility of good airfield performance.

Bombardier has suggested a price of \$28-29 million, which makes it more expensive than the similarly sized Avro RJX85 at \$27.4 million.

Embraer ERJ-140

The ERJ-140 is rumoured to have been Embraer's pre-emptive strike against speculation that Bombardier is planning to develop a regional jet derivative of its Continental business jet. Simply another derivative of the ERJ-145, the ERJ-140 offers a capacity between the ERJ-145 and ERJ-135.

One important question that the launch of the ERJ-140 raises is, what is the future for the ERJ-135? Always seen as a scope clause buster, most scope clauses will allow the ERJ-140 as much as the ERJ-135. With almost equal operating costs many orders for the ERJ-135 are likely to be transferred to the larger model. Deliveries of the ERJ-135 only commenced recently and 120 of the total orders for 140 aircraft have been placed by American Eagle, Business Express and Continental Express.

One thing that is highlighted by the launch of this derivative is Embraer's responsiveness to the market. Embraer has demonstrated its willingness to launch a product to satisfy its customer's needs.

328/428Jets

The Fairchild 328Jet/428Jet family had three advantages relative to its competitors:

- 1 Availability of a 44 seater
- 1 Superior airfield performance
- 1 Early availability of the 328Jet

These advantages may have now been lost or diminished. The availability of the 428Jet was expected to be a significant advantage, since many carriers in the US are limited by scope clauses to below 50 seats. The advantage has been reduced with the announcement of the ERJ-140 and rumours of a Bombardier Continental RJ.

The superior airfield performance of both the 328Jet and the 428Jet is a clear-cut advantage. Unfortunately as shown elsewhere in this issue, (*see Can field performance save the turboprop?*, page 36) this is a relatively small market and weight growth during development has reduced this advantage substantially.

The final and probably most significant advantage of the 328Jet is its earlier availability, but since both Bombardier and Embraer are increasing the production rates on their regional jet programmes this advantage could be short-lived. The extended development time-scale for the 428Jet will also put it at a disadvantage relative to the newly launched Embraer ERJ-140. The latter will be available for deliveries some 24 months ahead of the 428Jet. 

