

A300B2/B4 in service & operations

More than two-thirds of A300B2/B4 in operation are freighters, operating at low rates of utilisation. They are also used extensively in the Turkish market.

The majority of A300B2/B4s in service operate as freighters. Many of these aircraft are used for small package freighter operations where low utilisation and short average flight cycle (FC) times are normal. This can have an adverse effect on operating costs, especially with respect to engine reserves and the number of line checks required relative to the number of flight hours (FH).

The A300B4F, however, is in a class of its own. The aircraft has a gross structural payload of 95,000-98,000lbs, net payload of 83,000-86,000lbs and containerised volume of 11,200-11,500 cubic feet (see *A300B2/B4 modification & upgrade programmes, page 14*). The only other types with similar payload characteristics are the 767-200SF, lower gross weight variants of the 767-300SF and the A300-600RF. All three of these have lease rates or acquisition costs at least twice as high as the A300B4-100F/-200F. The low utilisation of many of the A300B4F's operations means the 767-200/-300 and A300-600 cannot compete economically.

A large number of A300B4Fs are used by European freight operators, including Channel Express, TNT, Air Contractors and European Air Transport. These four airlines operate a total of 20 aircraft, about a third of the global freighter fleet, on express package operations. A further 14 aircraft are used by Astar Air Cargo and Express.Net in a similar way to the European freighters.

The majority of small or express package operations is based on night flying for five or six days per week. In addition, most are hub-and-spoke style operations, with aircraft flying into hubs and then back to outstations on return flights. In this case, most aircraft achieve just two sectors per night. In some cases, airlines roster their aircraft on stopping

flights to and from a hub.

Air Contractors in Ireland operates three A300B4-100Fs leased from Europe Airpost. Two of these are flown on a wet-lease basis for the French Post Office and the third on a wet lease for FedEx. One aircraft flies between Lyons and Paris and the second from Ajaccio in Corsica to Marseille and then on to Paris. It then makes the return journey via the same cities. The third aircraft operates a return flight between Dublin and Paris, via London Stansted. These aircraft operate these routes for just four or five nights per week.

"On this basis we accumulate a total of 2,500FC per year for all three aircraft, making an average of 770FC per aircraft," says John Rawls, ground operations manager at Air Contractors. "The average utilisation is also 900 block hours (BH) per year per aircraft, meaning the average cycle time is just over 1BH. With this level of operation, the aircraft are generally very reliable, and have a technical dispatch reliability rate of more than 98.5%."

European Air Transport, a subsidiary of DHL, operates a fleet of 12 A300B4-200Fs, the largest fleet of A300B4Fs. The airline operates from its hub at Brussels

to several cities in Europe. Average cycle time is 1.2BH, and average flight time just 55 minutes. This generates an annual utilisation of just 1,000FH per year.

Turn times, including time to load or off-load freight, are about 90 minutes at outstations, while turn times at hubs can be three to four hours when freight is both off-loaded and loaded.

Average cycle times are longer and rates of utilisation higher for operators in North America, where cities across a route network are further apart than in Europe.

A large number of A300B2/B4s are operated by Turkish carriers. MNG Airlines has 10 aircraft, including seven freighters, and will shortly add a further two aircraft to its fleet. Besides MNG, Kuzu, Onur Air, Fly Air, Saga Airlines and ACT operate a further 19 aircraft. This takes the fleet in Turkey to 29, of which thirteen are freighters. The fleet will grow by a further five aircraft with the addition of a further two by MNG, one more by Fly Air, and two more by a new carrier.

Turkey provides an ideal operating base for the A300B4F, since it is located where it can operate 2-3 hour flights to most European cities, and also similar route lengths to the Middle East.

MNG Airlines has an average flight time of 3-4 hours, and an average flight cycle of 2.5FH. On this type of operation, MNG achieves an annual utilisation of about 2,000FH per year for its freighter aircraft. This level of utilisation and average FC time allows lower maintenance costs through fewer line and ramp checks relative to annual FH, and significantly reduced engine reserves compared to aircraft generating low rates of utilisation. **AC**

Most A300B4s operate as freighters, performing overnight express freight services at low rates of utilisation. In many cases the aircraft only accumulates about 1,000FH per year. Operators report high technical dispatch reliability.

