Test Fleet

Boeing will build six flight test airplanes for the standard 787-8, scheduled to begin flying late next year and enter service in mid-2008 with All Nippon Airways. This version will carry 220-250 passengers and have a range of 8,000 naut. mi. Two airplanes will be built for the 787-3 version, which will accommodate up to 330 people and will fly 3,000 naut. mi. Another two airplanes will be built to test the 787-9. It will have a maximum gross weight of 540,000 lb. and a range of 8,600 naut. mi.

Seat Cert

The National Institute for Aviation Research (NIAR)’s Crash Dynamics Laboratory has certified its first seat for use in commercial helicopters (see photo). The customer, East/West Industries of Ronkonkoma, N.Y., specializes in designing and manufacturing seats and ejection seat subsystems. To meet demand for research and certification work, NIAR has installed a sled built by MTS Systems Inc., capable of testing seats across a wide range of g-force loadings to meet FAA regulations. Six new crash dummies have been added to the seven already in service.

Sib Suit

French company Thales has initiated legal action against the India-based weekly publication Outlook, claiming it printed a defamatory article accusing Thales of bribery to obtain a contract worth $3.4 billion to build six Scorpene submarines. The company is suing the publication for about $4 million. Outlook has been directed to send its reply to the courts.

First Flight

The U.S. Army’s new Armed Reconnaissance Helicopter (ARH) is scheduled to make its first flight this quarter, followed by initial performance testing in August. Bell Helicopter Textron is under contract to build 368 of the single-engine, turbine-powered rotorcraft. Plans call for the ARH to become operational with Army combat units in the fourth quarter of 2008. The first four aircraft for the systems design and development phase are under construction at the company’s XVorX facility in Arlington, Tex. The ARH will replace the OH-58D Kiowa Warrior, of which 29 have been lost since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, leaving 347 in operation.

MRO on the Grow

BBA Aviation Services Group has acquired Onitic Engineering & Manufacturing Inc., a supplier of original equipment manufacturer (OEM)-licensed parts and an MRO services provider based in Chatsworth, Calif. The company’s chief focus centers on developing product licensing agreements with major OEMs and having full responsibility for supply and support for a specific OEM product or service. Onitic is the latest in a series of acquisitions by BBA Aviation aimed at strengthening its MRO business.

UAV Demo

British defense technology company Qinetiq is attempting to arouse interest in unmanned aerial vehicles operation through a demonstration project at Parc Aberporth, Wales. The initial three-month program will showcase the utility of three classes of UAVs for commercial and government applications. Both rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft will be flown with 10-kg., 20-kg. and heavier air vehicles in a variety of roles. Potential missions include flood monitoring, pipeline surveillance, crop dusting, traffic management and coastal patrol. Qinetiq will conduct the program on behalf of the Welsh Development Agency.

Airport Options

The Netherlands National Airspace Laboratory (NLR) will help determine the future of Reykjavik Airport in Iceland. Reykjavik serves as an alternate destination in support of the country’s Keflavik International Airport and is one of a limited number of choices where the capital city could expand. The NLR is being commissioned to study options, including closure.

Higher Learning

Great Britain’s Cranfield University is teaming with Dubai Aerospace Enterprise to establish an aerospace institute in the Middle East with the goal of accommodating 8,000 students by 2015. Cranfield will provide support for a range of subjects leading to master’s and doctorate degrees. The new institute would be located at Dubai’s Jebel Ali Airport City.

Signed and Sealed

Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI) and Bell Helicopter Textron have signed a memorandum of agreement whereby KAI would become the sole-source provider of airframes for the new Bell 429 twin-engine, lightweight helicopter. In addition, KAI would secure rights to sell and assemble the aircraft for customers in South Korea and China. The pact, worth about $150 million, is expected to include manufacture of airframes for the next 10 years. Bell is developing the aircraft in cooperation with KAI and Mitsui Bussan Aerospace Co. First flight of a pre-production, prototype 429 is tentatively scheduled for third quarter of this year, followed in February 2007 by first flight of a production aircraft. A pre-production main rotor system for the 429 flew on Feb. 28 at Bell’s facility in Mirabel, Quebec.