

understand the problems, the size and complexity of the job must be appreciated. When an Airline buys a new aircraft they have a choice to buy the aircraft fully equipped to fly, like a car. Or to buy an airframe and purchase everything else from the engines to the coffee makers separately, for the airframe manufacturer to install.

Saudi Arabian Airlines have chosen the latter, so their procurement people have, for some considerable time, been selecting vendors for all the bits and pieces, large and small, that go into making the aircraft that the passenger, sees and relies upon.

As the new fleet comes solely from US planemakers, and the exchange rate has not been favourable to the pound. UK Plc has not fared well in this procurement programme. However a UK based baggage container manufacturer is now going through the final stages of assessment prior to an expected order.

On the ground UK companies have fared somewhat better, securing contracts to support the new fleet with Ground Service Equipment (GSE). This secondary procurement programme, worth tens of millions of pounds, calls for the provision of some 500 individual pieces of GSE. UK companies are already in on the ground floor, supplying Passenger Stairs, Ground Power Units, Cargo Transfer Transporters, and aircraft tow-bars, while offers for Catering Trucks and Tractors, are being favorably considered.

To cater for the new generation of bigger heavier aircraft, the Kingdom is finally considering upgrades to many of their Airfields whilst at the same time new maintenance facilities for Saudi Arabian Airlines and modern Air Traffic Control (ATC), Radar, Fire Fighting and

Airfield Rescue Equipment for the Airport Operators are being planned.

While another year has passed without the opening of the new King Fahd International Airport in the Eastern Province, Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport has seen the appointment of privately owned aircraft handling agents, (breaking Saudi Arabian Airline's monopoly) and the AlSalam Aircraft Company's appointment to maintain the RSAF's fleet of BAe Tornado fighter aircraft and AWACS.

UK Plc should be able to take a positive and leading role in these programmes and also in the upgrading and procurement plans. But worldwide attention is focused on these projects, and interested parties will have to be well motivated, innovative, diligent, and backed by UK Government Agencies, if they are to be successful.

During the year Airbus, Boeing and McDonnell Douglas saw their combined jet-airliner order books climb above the 1,000 mark to give them their best year since the late 1980's. However it is interesting to note that the big numbers came from the new generation narrowbodied aircraft, Boeing and Airbus both fairing well in this sector.

The fall out from Boeing's acquisition of MDC could be significant in the Helicopter industry where the combined Boeing/MDC operation, could be for disposal. Textron and United Technologies, owners of Bell and Sikorsky have over the past couple of years indicated that they may be interested in consolidating the Industry. European manufacturers could soon find themselves facing the problems that now confront the European planemakers.

The Royal Saudi Arabian Airforce (RSAF) has signed their first ever aircraft contract with

France for the purchase of 12 Eurocopter Cougar MkII helicopters configured for combat search and rescue operations (CSAR). The deal worth some US\$ 600m could, however, be overshadowed by the talks that are currently going on between helicopter manufacturers and the RSAF to provide them with up to 44 Helicopters, configured for purely Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, which would give the RSAF their first Kingdomwide SAR cover.

As a means of transportation, flying is still the safest way to travel. Unfortunately the collision of a Saudi Arabian Airlines, B747 with an inbound Kazakh Airways Ilyushin Il-76 Cargo plane near New Delhi Airport on the 12th November was one of 57 accidents making 1996 the worst year on record for air safety. The fact that 20 of those accidents involved freight positioning, non passenger airline operations, or the use of ageing aircraft, many of which are converted to freighters, underlines that this is an area of airline safety that needs more examination by the safety regulators.

The UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) have identified that worldwide, the accident, rate of freighters is "far higher" than for passenger aircraft. It has also been established that the traditional low achievers in safety, the "developing economies" accounted for 45 of the 57 accidents, but that the "high achievers" suffered some high casualty accidents. The TWA crash into the Atlantic shortly after take off from New York's JFK Airport, the Saudi Arabian Airlines collision, and the ValuJet crash in the Florida Everglades, accounted for some 650 of the year's total of 1,840 deaths.

The investigations into the TWA and Saudi Arabian Airlines accidents are, as we go to press, still ongoing. In the case of TWA,
Continued Overleaf