

Cleburne company rolls out first plane

By JIM STREET

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Sometimes lost among the area airframe manufacturing giants like Bell, LTV, General Dynamics and the like is Frakes Aviation at the Cleburne Airport.

This week, Frakes rolled out its first modified Nord 262 which will be marketed as the Frakes M298.

"Actually, as far as the Federal Aviation Administration is concerned it is a modified Nord 262 but it will be marketed as the M298," said J. Fred Frakes, the company's "buck stops here guy—we don't have a president."

The firm moved to Cleburne from California two years ago and has just added to its facility and now has 28,500 square feet of space.

"Modification is our business," said Frakes. "We modify only transport category aircraft."

This means aircraft that fly passengers in scheduled service, though Frakes said many transport aircraft are used for executive or even private airplanes.

"Basically, our aircraft are used in commuter service," he said.

Aviation

The Nord 262 is a twin-engine commuter aircraft built by Aerospatiale of France, makers of the French half of the supersonic Concorde.

Frakes removed the European engines and installed United Aircraft of Canada Ltd. PT6 turboprop engines, all new Collins navigation and communications equipment and Hamilton-Standard cabin pressurization and air-conditioning equipment.

The interiors were subcontracted to a Waco firm.

"When the aircraft leaves the facility here it will be ready to go," he said.

Allegheny Airlines' commuter system, including wholly owned subsidiaries Ransom Airlines of Philadelphia and Mohawk Air Service of Washington, D.C., has orders for 15 of the aircraft, to be delivered one per month beginning in July.

Many of Frakes' employees are former General Dynamics or LTV Aerospace Corp. people who found themselves jobless in the decline in defense contracts in recent years.

Frakes said the M298 will provide a service where the passenger "will not be downgraded after getting off a jet."

It will have an interior that permits "standup walk-around" ability, toilet facilities, beverage service and will accommodate 28 passengers "in the jet comfort they have become accustomed to."

The plane is the first to use the PT6-A45 engine, which Frakes said is considerably quieter than existing turbo-prop engines.

It turns only 1,700 revolutions per minute on takeoff—far slower than present turbine engines—and cruises at 1,425 r.p.m. The slower speed is made possible by a five-bladed propeller which Frakes believes is the first ever certificated in this country.

The slower the speed of the turbine, the quieter the engine, both to those in the cabin and to those on the ground, he said.

A long strike at UACL caused supply problems to some airframe manufacturers using the PT6 engine, but Frakes said he had no problems because engines were ordered 18 months ago as long-lead-time items and because of the cooperative attitude at UACL.

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MEACHAM FIELD seen from the air has a "big airport look" to it now after completion of a seven-year improvement program that gave it a completely new terminal building and airfield including a 7,500-foot main runway with an instrument landing system.

At a briefing this week to announce plans for next Sunday's open house, Meacham Aero owner Don Hansen flew some newsmen on a "trip around the field."

The air show will include a flyby by some Confederate Air Force airplanes. Normally, the CAF does not perform unless it can guarantee its costs which, in the operation of some of the World War II airplanes, can be quite high.

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D-FW AIRPORT ended its first calendar year Dec. 31 with 6.7 million enplanements.

In its monthly report, D-FW said it handled 605,924 outbound passengers in December and 6,791,749 for the year. Enplanements is a count only of departing passengers.

The airport handled 71,586.9 tons of cargo during the year, 32,785.5 tons of mail and saw 274,162 air carrier operations (takeoffs and landings).

Total operations in December were 27,633, of which 22,661 were air carrier movements. For the year there were a total of 316,236 takeoffs and landings.

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BRANIFF international Airlines reported a 10.6 per cent increase in revenue passenger miles systemwide in 1974 over the previous year.

The gain was 10.9 per cent on the domestic system and 9.6 per cent on the international routes — to more than six billion RPMs.