

No woolly Mammoth

There is nothing remotely woolly about Mammoth Freighters' booming freighter conversion business, which is making ever greater strides, as Roger Hailey reports

There is growing momentum behind the B777-300 conversion market, with large orders gathering pace for the two big players.

Trade press reports suggest that Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) has received an order for 11 B777-300ERSF conversions from China's Hongyuan Group.

And US-based Mammoth Freighters confirmed that AviaAM Leasing is the launch customer for six of its B777-300ERMFs, with the first aircraft for conversion sourced from Aircastle for future operations at Bluebird Nordic, Iceland.

Mammoth now has firm orders for 29 B777 freighter conversions from multiple customers, and another 12 B777 freighter conversions in advanced stages of commitment.

Mammoth has two B777 conversion programmes underway, for the -200LR and -300ER variants of the successful passenger aircraft.

Its launch customer for the -200LR freighter conversion was Canada's Cargojet, in November last year.

IAI's 'Big Twin' programme for the B777-300 conversion has

already seen more than 50 orders booked.

IAI originally launched the Big Twin with GECAS, the latter being acquired by AerCap in November 2021.

Hongyuan Group will take delivery of the first IAI converted B777-300ERs in the second half of 2024 and those freighters will reportedly be placed with Air Belgium and Jiangxi Cargo Airlines.

Orders to come

Brian McCarthy, vice president marketing and sales at Florida-based Mammoth, says that further orders for the -300ER are in the offing, beyond the 12 already mentioned.

The first B777-300ER of this order will begin its pre-conversion flight testing and conversion in early 2023 at Aspire MRO's facility at Fort Worth Alliance Airport in Texas.

'This is a market where Covid exposed a lot of weaknesses in our supply chain logistics to flag carriers, passenger airlines, the military and governments'

Brian McCarthy, Mammoth

Mammoth co-chief executive Bill Wagner says that the B777-300ERMF is a "fuel efficient, high-volume, heavy lifting, long-range freighter that will reliably serve the global air cargo market for decades to come".

The reconfigured aircraft will be able to carry just under 100 tons of cargo on transatlantic routes and is expected to serve EU-US or China-EU trunk routes.

McCarthy says that the -200LR programme has gone well and Mammoth is well under way with the first 200LR aircraft going through conformity build and certification, but to have this kind of order activity so early is "unprecedented".

McCarthy speaks of a warm reception from the market for the B777-200LR conversion programme, with firm present orders of around 23 aircraft: "It was a kind of sleeper aircraft

that has become popular. It is a shorter fuselage that offers higher density which is welcomed by some operators.

"The 200LR gets you as close to the performance of a factory freighter at very attractive economics."

Asked about the clear appetite in the market for the B777 passenger to freighter (P2F) conversion programmes, McCarthy outlines a "fundamental shift" in the way airlines and nation states now view the need to secure airfreight capacity, as the lessons of Covid-related supply chain issues are analysed.

Covid exposure

"I think this is a market where Covid exposed a lot of weaknesses in our supply chain logistics to flag carriers, passenger airlines, the military and governments.

"There has been a fundamental shift in the reasons behind the



Photo: Mammoth Freighters



Mammoth B777-300ER at Aspire MRO's facility at Alliance Airport in Fort Worth

demand for long-range airfreight capacity. People don't want to get caught off guard again, as happened during Covid.

"But there remains an uneasiness about wars, natural disasters, pandemic, climate refugee movement and economic disruption.

"I think those situations are starting to expose the vulnerabilities of countries and island nations that do not have enough maindeck cargo lift."

Ghost freighters

McCarthy says that the use of zero passenger "ghost freighters", where passenger aircraft cabins were laden with packages during the pandemic, highlighted the limitations of what he calls "a poor man's freighter" compared with production line or P2F maindeck capacity.

"That Zero Pax lift is disappearing as fast as it arrived with regulatory authorities reserving this special use for

emergency response only," he comments.

"There is a new call by a lot of countries and governments to have a more robust long-range lift capability so they can get themselves out of trouble if once again passenger belly capacity dries up."

McCarthy detects some urgency in the airfreight market in not having to rely totally on the integrators or freighter operators: "I think logistics giants are also hedging their bets by having more lift capacity than they may otherwise need, not only for emergencies or urgent situations but in having more options with how to move critical materials or time sensitive cargo by air."

There has been some public debate about an inventory shortage for aircraft conversion production lines due to supply chain issues, primarily those in oceanfreight.

Mammoth does have some product coming from Germany,

but the majority of its aircraft conversion components and materials originate in US manufacturing centres.

"We are trying to keep our supply chain onshore until things settle down. We are looking at this from a time and distance standpoint, so we have found more than enough supplier, MRO capacity and machine shops domestically."

The Mammoth strategy includes purchasing "significant quantities" of certain aluminium and extrusions to avoid those types of shortages affecting other conversion houses.

But with an eye on meeting future demand, in an extension of its production network, Mammoth is linking up with STS Aviation in the UK to carry out P2F work in Manchester for the conversion house's B777-200LR and B777-300ER programmes.

The STS facility will also provide Mammoth with AOG, product support, and spares

provisioning throughout Europe.

STS acquired the Manchester facility earlier this year as part of its expansion. It constitutes the firm's third facility in the UK.

Mammoth will begin inducting B777 aircraft for modification at the facility in mid-2024. Pacific Asia MRO facilities are also likely.

Aspiring to more

In August this year, Mammoth signed a multi-year contract with Aspire MRO to perform P2F conversions and maintenance related work for Mammoth's two B777 programmes.

Located at Fort Worth Alliance Airport, Aspire provides six widebody production bays, with B777-specific tooling and work platforms.

Mammoth has already secured additional facilities at Fort Worth Alliance Airport which are being used to accommodate the company's warehousing, main cargo door assembly, logistics, and kitting requirements.