

Raytheon 'Toasts' Starships

Company cites high cost of supporting a small fleet as the chief reason for its decision

EDWARD H. PHILLIPS/DALLAS

Raytheon Aircraft Co. is scrapping and incinerating all of its Beechcraft Starship I business aircraft, and plans to complete the destruction process by the end of this year.

"The business decision has been made to cease support of the Starship and take those aircraft under our control out of commission, salvage all usable parts and terminate the program," a company representative said.

As of late last week, six Starships already had been stripped of avionics, engines, propellers and landing gear, cut up and incinerated. Evergreen Air Center's heavy maintenance facility in Marana, Ariz., is responsible for the salvage procedure. Evergreen has an EPA-approved incinerator capable of producing the intense heat required to thoroughly burn carbon fiber composites. Three pre-production airplanes, which were not certified by Raytheon Aircraft Co. (RAC), were the first to be destroyed, followed recently by three other airframes.

BETWEEN 1985-95, RAC manufactured three prototypes and 50 production airplanes. The initial Model 2000 and the upgraded Model 2000A version of the Starship featured airframes fabricated from advanced carbon fiber composite materials, two Pratt & Whitney Canada PT6-67A turboprop engines and Collins Pro Line 4 avionics. Final production versions of the airplane cost \$4.9 million, according to RAC.

Although it was a bold attempt to reinvent the business airplane, the Starship proved to be too expensive for the performance offered and was rejected by the marketplace in favor of existing turboprop and jet aircraft. But manufacturing lessons learned from the Star-

ship have helped RAC develop advanced, more efficient techniques for fabricating composite fuselages of the Premier I and Hawker Horizon jets (the Premier I has entered service and the larger Horizon is scheduled for FAA certification next year).

According to RAC, about 40 airplanes

owned by the company (which currently are in storage) will be destroyed. Each would be prepared for ferry flights to Evergreen after inspection and issuance of an FAA temporary flight permit. Another 10 aircraft, however, remain in private hands, and Raytheon cannot force the owners to surrender their airplanes. Instead, the company is working with these individuals to "come to a mutually acceptable solution" on replacing the Starships with other aircraft, the representative said.

According to the company, supporting such a small fleet of airplanes has



Although Raytheon Aircraft Co. officials plan eventually to destroy all 53 Starships built, they may encounter stiff resistance from customers who want to keep them in service.

become cost-prohibitive. Only a few of the Starship's parts have commonality with other Beechcraft business airplanes, such as the King Air series. "It comes down to us continuing to make these one-off parts or finding other manufacturers to make the parts."

The latter option is unlikely because it would require a significant investment and obtaining supplemental FAA type certificates. In addition, it would be too costly to upgrade the fleet to meet FAA Reduced Vertical Separation Minimums, the representative said.

A number of these owners have se-