FACE THE FACTS WITH...

JOHN ROSANVALLON

John Rosanvallon is president and chief executive of Dassault Falcon Jet. He has worked for the company for 31 years and moved to the USA in1979. A Chevalier of the French Légion d'Honneur, he is a member of several French-American and aerospace organisations and has received numerous honours in recognition for his service to the industry. He updates Liz Moscrop on the company's performance.

Dassault Falcon Jet has just received Europe's largest-ever order from NetJets for 24 of its 7Xs. How did that come about?
We have worked hard on it over the last two years; in fact our first discussion was in early 1996. Over the last 10 years NetJets has given us a combined order of 13 various aircraft types and our relationship has consolidated. It is a spectacular deal and I am very pleased. NetJets is an entrepreneurial company and we enjoy good personal relationships with their executives. It is a very straightforward relationship, which is not layered to death.

What is happening with sales of the 7X?
We do not give figures between the published results, but the first aircraft will be delivered in April to a US customer, then two additional aircraft will be delivered in May in Europe just after certification. We are sold out through the end of 2010. The most challenging selling difficulty we have is that our customers have to wait years for delivery. We are finding that most customers already have a large-cabin aircraft, but do not have a good current aircraft. We are also aware of the used market. With recent models of the 2000EX there are very few available and the prices are still high.

Where is the bulk of Falcon sales coming from?
In 2005 we announced a record year. We had an amazing 123 sales, 11 of them in Russia and eastern Europe. In 1994 we sold our first 2000 to Gazprom, the first large-cabin Western aircraft in Russia. We have come a long way since then. Our non-US business is very strong, with the UK our most active western European country. We have a big market share in Brazil and areas like India. Sales are steady in the USA, but new and expanding markets are such that they represent over half of the total.

How will you cater for this increase in sales growth?
Over the next two years we have to increase our capacity by roughly 50%. We have new models with new processes. We used Catia to design the 7X and will use the same approach with PLM [product lifecycle management] in completions. We have built a new facility in Little Rock and will add more people. However, aerospace engineers are difficult to find and the market is tight. Gulfstream and Bombardier are also hiring the same type of people.

How long does it take to train an engineer to use your Catia software?
We introduced the process with the Falcon 2000, but used it to its full extent with the Falcon 7X. In the case of Little Rock, where we focus on interior design, it will take six to 12 months before an engineer is well-trained to do what we want to do.

FROM SCREEN TO MACHINE – 7X DEBUTS AT NBAA

Dassault is exhibiting the first completely digital Falcon 7X with a fully fitted interior at the static park. Although the aircraft, s/n 03, is certificated in France, because all tests have not yet been completed the aircraft is classed as experimental under US Federal Aviation Administration rules, so we are not able to bring you a report of its in-flight comfort.

The test programme is well under way with over 940h flown over 306 test flights. Certification flights with the European Aviation Safety Agency and FAA will be completed by the end of 2006 with final certification and first deliveries expected in early 2007. Falcon 7X s/n 04 has recently joined the test line. "When we announced the Falcon 7X program in 2001, we fully intended to build the first of the next generation of business jets," says John Rosanvallon, president and chief executive of Dassault Falcon Jet. "The aircraft has not disappointed us."

Forty aircraft are now in production, with s/n 12 in final assembly in Bordeaux. The next delivery position available is in the second half of 2010.

What is happening with the Falcon 2000DX programme?
It is on track. The last Falcon 2000, serial number 231, will be delivered at the end of 2006 or in early 2007. The first 2000DX is set for delivery in early 2008. It has been a smooth and uneventful certification process as it is a close derivative of the 2000EX. The fuselage is already fully assembled then we start on the final assembly.

As a Frenchman who has made his home in America, have you noticed a strong cultural difference between your French and US teams? If so, how do you manage the differences?
Our last five six years has witnessed a better team effort between our French and US teams. All main activity now falls under worldwide leadership. We have two people co-leading our efforts – one in the USA and one in France. Throughout the company we recognised customer service was a priority. Our chairman was involved in that effort. Dassault had always had a strong engineering culture – now we offer solid customer service too. The cultural mix goes back to the early 1960s and is not something built in a few months. Now people in the USA have teamed with Falcon for many years. We enjoy a totally bi-cultural environment, which we build on year after year.

Dassault is also a member of two of the most important aerospace groups in the USA, AIA [Aerospace Industries Association] and GAMA [General Aviation Manufacturers Association]. We were the first non-US company accepted as a GAMA member. We have worked hard to consolidate our US presence and have over 2,500 employees in North America.

Tell us about Dassault's supersonic programme
Our chairman recently stated that it would become a priority as soon as we had the 7X behind us and had more resources. We are working hard on key technologies, in particular sonic boom reduction. Flying supersonic over land would be really exciting and we have not given up. Dassault wants to be part of the international team that builds the first supersonic business jet.