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DLR and Lufthansa Technik announce joint development and maintenance of the new A320 ATRA research aircraft

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The A 320 ATRA research aircraft

The German Aerospace Center (DLR) and Lufthansa Technik (LHT) have reached an agreement in respect of joint development and maintenance of the future A320 ATRA (Advanced Technology Research Aircraft). In the next two years, LHT will be supporting DLR with a maintenance programme tailored specially to DLR's needs.

From airliner to research plane

Research and test flights require rigorous pre-flight and post-flight checks. For example, before any flight, fuselage and interior instruments, controls and other systems must be inspected: engineers call this 'making modifications'.

Then, as far as the A320 programme goes, annual flying hours must be limited to 200. This special stipulation, which does not apply to normal airliners, requires a special maintenance programme. LHT will be supplying DLR with Total Technical Support (TTS) so that DLR can continue to fulfil its research and development responsibilities, as it has been doing safely and reliably to date.

For example, services provided by LHT will cover such aspects as provision and repair of components, and they will assume responsibility for the necessary checks to the aircraft and the engines. Furthermore, LHT will support DLR in future modifications to the largest DLR research aircraft.

ATRA is set to become an essential tool for both German and European aerospace research. The new research aircraft will help to deal with future urgent research projects into more efficient air travel which leaves a smaller carbon footprint. Firstly, the airliner will undergo a two-year rebuild at Airbus to convert it into a test aircraft, after which it will be used jointly in collaborative projects. Definitive plans for the first DLR missions from autumn 2008 include, on the one hand, testing low-noise take-off and landing and integrating wide-ranging noise-reduction measures, the aim being to make the new craft a 'quiet aircraft demonstrator'. Another definitive plan is to try out new display interfaces as part of research into HMIs (Human/Machine Interfaces), while the pace of turbulent-wake research will be stepped up.

The new aircraft's use is the product of a joint interest on the part of DLR and its partners towards a lasting collaboration in the context of research and development into the 'aircraft of tomorrow'. ATRA will boost not only academic research: it will make a difference at an industrial level too. Most representatives of the German and European aerospace industry and its suppliers, including EADS,

Airbus, Rolls-Royce, MTU, Liebherr and Diehl, have already declared an interest in the new DLR research aircraft.

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