

British Airways unveils low-fare plans

BRITISH Airways has announced proposals for new low advance-purchase excursion fares between the UK and Scandinavia—as low as one-third of current economy fares—as a spin-off from current discussions between the British and Scandinavian governments (see *Flight* last week, page 1835). The British flag carrier has revealed that it has asked for CAA permission to offer weekend standby and senior-citizen fares on its UK domestic routes. All are subject to government approval, and there are indications that although SAS has been willing to introduce Apex fares, it has no great enthusiasm for reducing regular fares.

The flag carrier has also unveiled plans for three-class service on many of its mixed business/vacation routes, and has strongly renewed its hint that it will withdraw from the International Air Transport Association if the Montreal special meeting at the end of this month does not approve reforms which will allow it to put them into practice. "We aren't playing politics," says director commercial operations Gerry Draper. "Either the Iata membership accepts the executive's recommendations or we go it alone."

All the announcements stem from a British Airways study of low-fare markets run in parallel with the

B.CAL study which produced the independent carrier's "six-lane Skyway" proposal for the London-Los Angeles route. In many ways the three-class proposal is similar. The main and complementary aims are to reduce the cost of carrying low-fare passengers by flying more of them in the same cabin space, while giving the full-fare economy traveller the benefit of the low full-fare load factors which he pays for.

The difference between the British Airways and B.CAL approaches is that British Airways is unwilling to configure the aircraft permanently in a three-class arrangement because the required mix varies from route to route. BA has first-hand experience of route-specialised aircraft, operating a high-density 747 with a 32-seat economy cabin upstairs which is theoretically dedicated to the London-Toronto route. "It ends up in some pretty funny parts of the world," comments one executive. Thus the airline intends to offer the same standard of seating in the "Club" (executive) and "Discount" (thrift) classes, and is working with Boeing on the design of a cabin divider which can be moved forward or aft during a transit stop if necessary.

Movable dividers may be fitted to most of the airline's wide-body aircraft. In general, Gerry Draper points

out, the narrow-body routes are either largely holiday routes or mainly business, so three-class will be most important on long-haul flights and on the denser European routes on which TriStars are used. The dividers will be moved to give an 80 per cent load factor in the discount class and an average 60 per cent in the new club class.

British Airways' studies are indicating that it will not be worthwhile to convert existing 747s to take 11 passengers abreast. The floor beams of these aircraft are not stressed to take 11-abreast, and conversion work would probably cost too much in money and lost aircraft hours to be economically justifiable.

- Scandinavian Apex fares will be as low as one-third of the regular scheduled return rates, which are the highest in Europe. They will be available on all BA and SAS services between the UK and Scandinavia from October 1. Advance-purchase period will be 30 days and the minimum stay will be seven days, according to current proposals.

- Proposed standby discount on UK domestic routes is 45 per cent, and the senior citizen discount is 40 per cent. The standby fare will be available at weekends only, and the senior citizen discount will apply only to midweek flights

More promotionals for Dallas-London

BRANIFF and Jetsave—the latter best known as an operator of advance-booking charter flights—are collaborating to offer package holidays to Texas from London. Offering ten nights in the USA for under £300, the new packages are likely to reduce yields even further on the daily 747 round-trip.

The US airline continues to insist that the new service is in profit, but is cagey about specifying load factors. These are now believed to be running at something over 50 per cent, hardly an ideal level for a route carrying a lot of low-fare traffic in the peak season. It is therefore not surprising to find Braniff promoting the sale of more tourist seats in the UK.

BA pilots warned on landings

BRITISH AIRWAYS has warned its crews that it is concerned at the incidence of heavy landings and unbalanced approaches. Following a series of incidents, crews have been warned that the safety margin in operations is being eroded.

Flight data recorders have revealed excessive speeds on approach, as much as 295kt within two minutes of touchdown, severe excursions in descent rate, and late flap-lowering. British Airways is now studying the dangers of unbalanced approaches leading to excessive sink rate and undershoots. According to the airline, there have been several cases of excessive landing shocks following poorly flown approaches.

EI Al's hard A300 bargain

ISRAELI flag carrier EI Al is likely to decide shortly whether to buy Airbus Industrie A300B4s, according to executive chairman Mordechai Ben-Ari. The airline expects "at least the same financial arrangements as Eastern obtained, possibly better," although this does not include the initial no-charge lease of four aircraft.

The carrier is thought to have decided on the A300 in principle, although it is continuing to study the Lockheed TriStar as an alternative. Major elements of the Eastern deal which EI Al may want to see repeated include participation by Airbus Industrie backers in the shareholding of the airline, and special compensation payments to bring B4 operating costs into line with those of optioned A300-10s.

Tu-134 loses ventral speedbrake

THE ventral door-type speedbrakes are being removed from Tupolev Tu-134s and Tu-134As. The modification is being carried out during major overhauls at the manufacturing plant in Kharkov.

The electrically operated brake is unique to the Tu-134 among airliners, although the F.28 has a tail-mounted brake. Most airliners use overwing spoilers as airbrakes, and the Tu-134s will eventually be modified so that the

spoilers can be opened in flight. The ventral brakes are being removed because they take so long to retract (about 10sec) that they are a hazard in the case of an overshoot.

Interflug is moving towards Category 2a operations with its Tu-134s. Autopilot equipment has been updated and crews are now being trained. Cat 2a minima are 150ft decision height and 600m runway visibility.

JAL operates Narita feeders

JAPAN Air Lines is operating feeder services from the new Narita Airport to three major Japanese cities. All other domestic flights will continue to use Haneda, but transfer between the two Tokyo airports is so difficult as to warrant special feeder flights from major centres.

Evening and morning roundtrips are being flown with DC-8-61s and Boeing 727-200s between Narita and Osaka, Fukuoka and Sapporo.