



## EL AL

so three times in 1974. This policy is given the credit for the high load factors which are now being achieved. El Al carried 66.8 per cent of all passengers in and out of Tel Aviv Ben Gurion between April and December 1975. The airline's general load factor over the Atlantic from April to September was 74 per cent.

El Al is anxious that this encouraging performance should not be impaired by more of the work stoppages which halted operations on 23 days last year. There are still rumblings of unrest among the maintenance personnel, who closed down El Al during the autumn, and there is apprehension about negotiations with the pilots, whose current salary contract expires on March 31.

Flight-crew salaries at El Al are at present divided into three separate elements: basic salary, which averages £550 a month paid in Israeli currency; a foreign currency allocation which ranges up to £600 a month for senior 747 captains; and daily expenses up to a daily limit of £15 which vary according to flying time. The foreign currency payments have hitherto been subject to a special income tax rate "frozen" 20 years ago when the Israeli pound and the pound sterling were at parity.

Under fiscal reforms now being introduced in Israel, flight crews' pay will no longer be reckoned at the old exchange rate. The pilots claim that this will halve their net income. Premier Yitzhak Rabin and a panel of Cabinet ministers decided in March not to maintain the aircrews' tax privileges. The forthcoming wage negotiations are likely to be lengthy.

El Al will be evaluating a Ground Proximity Warning System on its newly delivered 747C over several months before deciding whether to retrofit all aircraft, including 707s, with this system or to experiment with another. Director of flight operations Capt Jacob Morgan said: "We know all about the drawbacks of GPWS and we are alert to the risk of over-confidence. But I think we shall be operating a system on which we shall never have to rely for ultimate safety."

Until recently El Al pilots were given a route check and an equipment check on a local flight twice a year. For economy reasons the system has now been altered so that 707 pilots get six-monthly checks on the aircraft and simu-

lator alternately. 747 pilots get all their route checks on the aircraft and their equipment checks on the simulator. Twice-yearly medicals are conducted by a Ministry of Transport board and include stress and resting electrocardiograph tests.

It is exceptional nowadays to find a younger-generation pilot at El Al who is not an Israeli Air Force veteran. Ninety-nine per cent are recruited by the airline after they complete military service on combat jets or transports. Capt Amitai Levine, director of 707 pilot training, explains that El Al requires a rigorous 12-month training period because its fleet is composed entirely of four-jet aircraft; unlike other airlines, El Al cannot give first officers their first operational experience on twins or trijets. The carrier is considering the creation of a new rank, Senior First Officer, to compensate for slow promotion.

In the past a first officer could expect to be upgraded to captain after four-and-a-half years. The requirement has now been increased to six years and 3,000hr on 707s. The training period for promotion to captain covers 250 hours and five route checks. If the candidate fails to pass all five checks he has a mandatory right to a second attempt after a further year.

El Al is in the course of retrofitting 50,000lb-thrust Pratt & Whitney JT9D-7Fs (converted from the JT9D-7s and -7As originally installed) to the three 747-200s. The 747C already has the more powerful engines. Mr Dov Birkenfield, manager for engines and accessories, said that the 16 engines (12 on aircraft and four spares) would be converted by late 1978 or early 1979. The pace of the programme is governed by the fact that only one engine at a time can be sent to Pratt & Whitney. Engines are flown to the US in "fifth pod" installations, a method also used on the 707s for shipment of their Rolls-Royce Conway engines to the BOAC overhaul centre in Britain. Overhaul of the JT3 engines on El Al's 720s and 707-320s has been performed at Lod by Israel Aircraft Industries since 1970, when an arrangement to freight JT3s to Snecma in France ended.

Since El Al's schedule is at some periods "leaner" than those of bigger airlines, it can ground an aircraft for up to two months for overhaul, says Mr Abraham Weinstock, deputy director of maintenance. El Al's 707s are overhauled at 12,000hr and the 320s at 13,000hr. The life of the 707s has been extended to 70,000hr by a programme of wing-skin and crown modifications.

Ben Gurion Airport's new cargo terminal, which was opened in October, is being equipped with a nose-in dock for direct loading into and out of the warehouse. This will accord particularly well with El Al's new 747 freighter, which will increase the fleet's present cargo capacity by 65 per cent.

Transport Minister Mr Gad Ya'acobi hopes that air-freight rates from Israel to Europe will drop sharply when the new 747C begins operations. He says that at present it costs £175 to ship a ton of agricultural produce from Israel to Western Europe on a 707 passenger flight, and £375 a ton on a cargo jet. The difference exists because the freighters rarely have return loads to fill their holds. With the introduction of the 747C, which arrived at Ben Gurion from Seattle early in April, operating costs will drop and El Al could lower its charge on all flights from £375 to £190 per ton. But this would require Iata sanction of an initiative which, El Al recognises, might not win the approval of other airlines.

*El Al's fleet consists entirely of four-engined types, which causes some training and promotion problems*

