

HOLLAND HERALD

**ANTILLES ABC:
BEAUTY IN
THE BALANCE
THE ARTS OF
LUCBERT
DUTCH FILM:
BEHIND THE
BOOM
WRITERS:
KEES VAN
KOOTEN
ENTER THE
AIRBUS**



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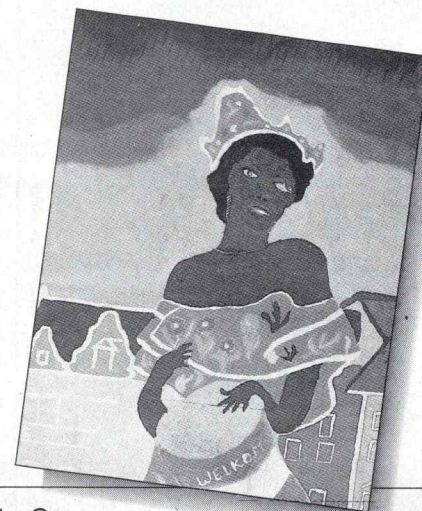
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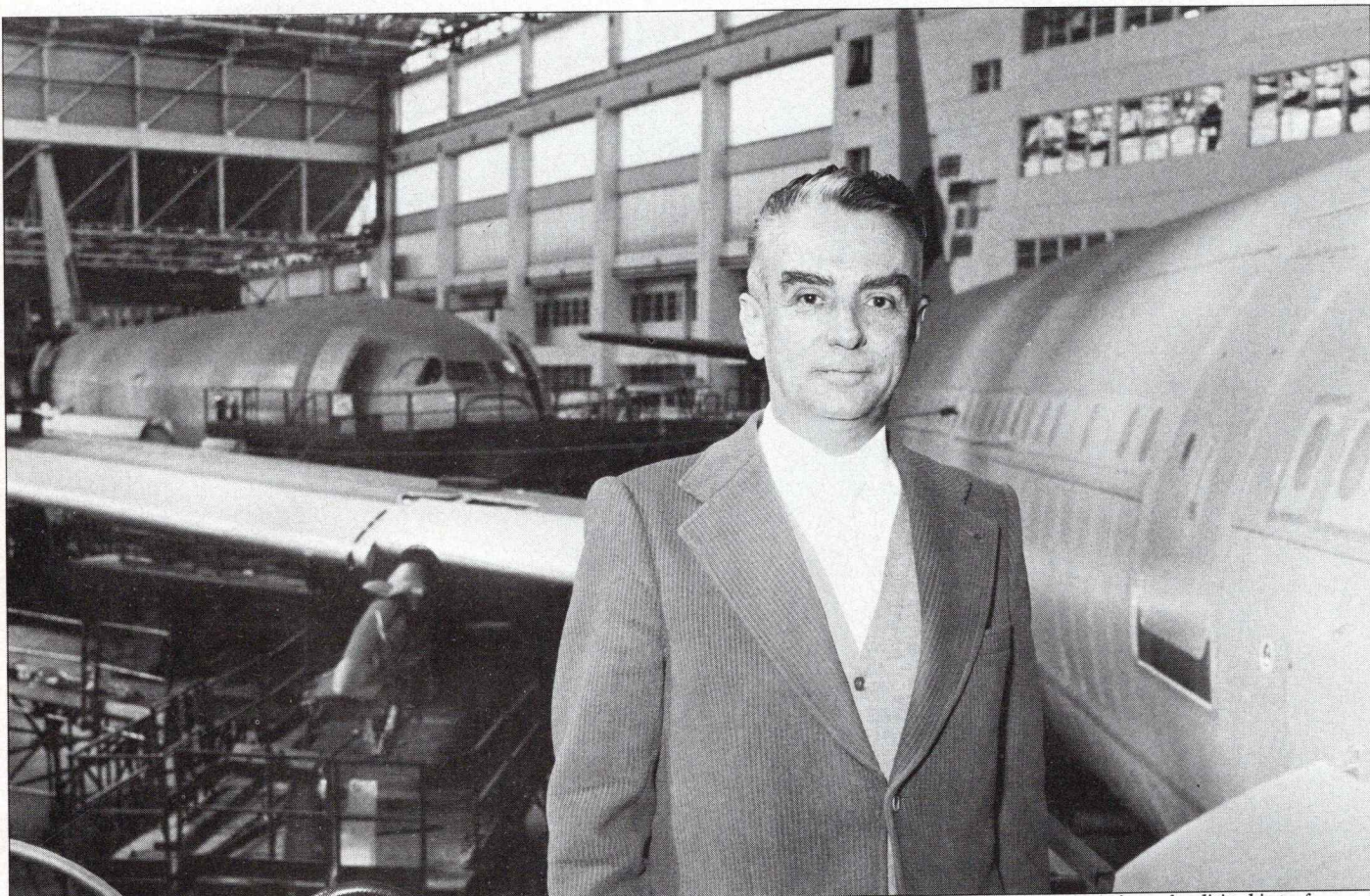


Airbus A310 'Albert Cuyt' over the Alps – 'pulling together paid off'

ENTER THE AIRBUS

On the introduction of the A130 Airbus to KLM routes, Michael Zwerin visits Airbus Industrie in Toulouse and talks to the men behind this rare product of European industrial cooperation

The new Europe may or may not be getting off the ground in Brussels and Strasbourg but its flagship is already flying high around the world. Confident, efficient, multi-lingual; Airbus Industrie illustrates how a united Europe can function on a day-to-day basis, cooperating to attain a goal none of them could reach on their own. It is a symbol as well as a corporation. The Airbus was designed as a result of



Above: Beteille – the two-engine solution

Below: Kracht: – ‘Our conclusions were free of political interference’



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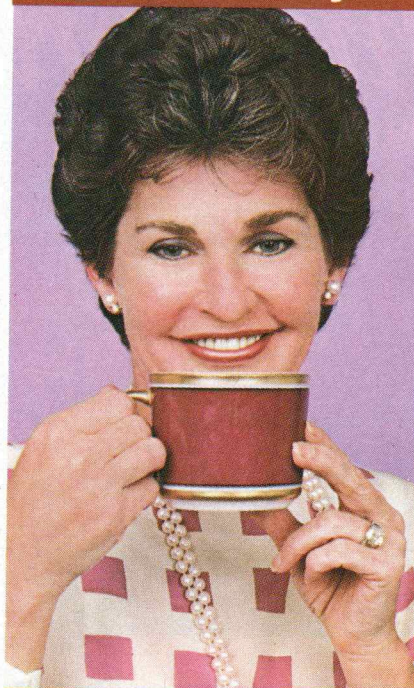
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projections, which concluded in 1965 that the best way to cope with expanding airport traffic was to put more people on each plane. Atmospheric pollution was also a factor, particularly noise. (The explosion of oil prices in the early 70s made fuel-efficiency a third essential.) The stage was set for a large capacity, wide-bodied, twin-engine short and medium-range aircraft that would incorporate the type of advance in state-of-the-art technology the Boeing 747 had already provided for long-range routes. Airbus Industrie was created in 1970, with Roger Beteille - also known as 'Mr Airbus' - as technical director. Frank Borman, ex-astronaut and president of Eastern Airlines, which has bought 34 Airbuses, has said that Beteille 'knows more about civilian aircraft design than any other four people I know.' Beteille became general manager of Airbus Industrie in 1974: 'In discussions with European airlines, it soon became clear that they were all looking for more or less the same solution to their problems. It was also obvious that the task was too big for any one country to tackle alone.

So manufacturers in Germany, France and Britain decided to form what they called a steering group to try to arrive at a common specification, working together with the national airlines of the three countries. Their governments

decided to support these efforts. This was the start.'

Felix Kracht, the German production manager, picks up the story: 'We did not want to repeat the errors that had been made in earlier European programmes. We agreed that the conclusions of our study should be purely economic, free of any political interference. This aircraft had to be competitive. We insisted on complete freedom to choose our suppliers on their merits alone whatever their nationalities. Our initial fight was to convince the governments that we should have complete freedom to define the technical specifications. We would not accept for the Airbus, as was the case for the Concorde, that the French would make the airframe for example and the engines would be British.'

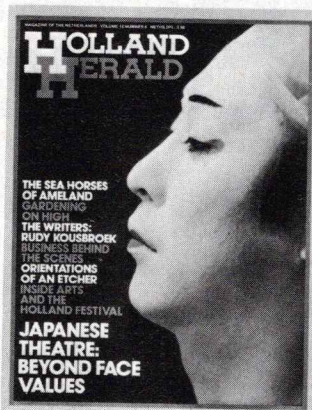
Arthur Howes, sales manager for Europe and Africa, is British. He goes over the history of post Second World War civilian European aviation: 'Before the Airbus, most European commercial aircraft - while technically successful - failed to achieve widespread marketing success because the fragmentation of the industry frustrated the development of a consistent long-range policy. The Comet was the world's first jetliner. It had its problems, but it was improved and eventually became a very good aircraft. The Trident was the first tri-jet. The Vanguard was a quiet, successful

airplane. The technology in the Caravelle was well ahead of the rest of the world.

And the Concorde was the first supersonic civilian airplane. So the Airbus is merely a continuation of a process that has been going on for some time. Only now, for the first time, we are able to compete with the big American manufacturers because we have pulled our resources together.'

French designer, German production engineer, British sales manager; a representative cross-section of Airbus Industrie. Located in a sprawling, wing-like building on the outskirts of the Toulouse airport, it is structured as a corporate umbrella under which - according to by-laws agreed to by the four partners - falls all design, planning, management and sales control. 'Control' is the key word. Airbus Industrie manufactures nothing. This work is sub-contracted back to the partners: British Aerospace owns 20 per cent; French Aerospatiale, 37.9 per cent; German Deutsche Airbus, 37.9 per cent and the Spanish CASA 4.2 per cent. Associate partners are Fokker and Belairbus. It is not a limited liability company; Arthur Howes explains: 'No airline would buy a plane from a limited liability company. Each partner and each government is fully responsible through a system of mutual guarantees. Let's say - a stupid example, it can never happen - the

THE DUTCH CONNECTION



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Spanish tail falls off. All the other companies take full responsibility. Or if British Aerospace were to go bankrupt, the other partners have the right to take over its tools and plant and continue manufacturing. All partners guarantee all Airbus Industrie commitments. Actually we are in a position to provide the airlines with more guarantees than they can get from Boeing.'

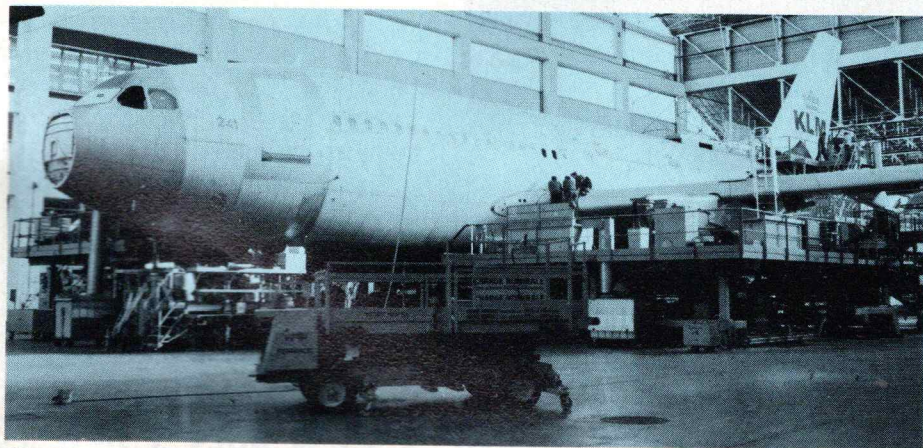
Boeing is a palpable presence here. Now that Lockheed and McDonnell-Douglas have ceased manufacturing three-engine wide-body civilian aircraft, it is as though McEnroe and Connors were the only pro tennis players left on the circuit. Last

year Boeing took 51 per cent of the market with its 747 and 767, while combined sales of the Airbus A300 and the highly advanced A310 for the medium-haul routes captured the other 49 per cent. As of the end of January, 1983, a total of 350 Airbuses had been sold (248 A300s, 102 A310s).

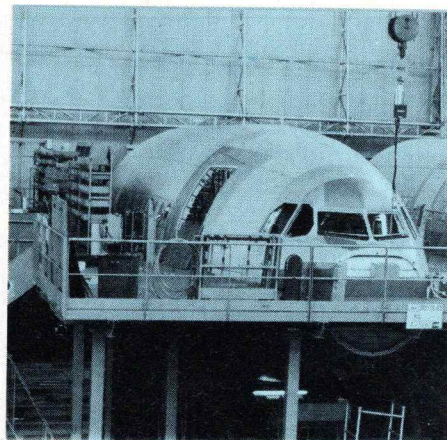
Both Airbus models come down the same production line in Toulouse, a fraction more than five per month this year. The production system is a microcosm of how a united Europe can cooperate sensibly when it wants to. 'European skilled labour is bound to their homes more than in the US,' says Kracht. 'So we decided

to split the Airbus into parts. With this philosophy we came to the so-called "stuffed big sections" where all the interiors — ducts, wiring, etcetera — have already been installed. And I say this with, I must admit, a certain diabolical pleasure because we had to overcome the objections of all of our partners, each of whom was looking to have the final assembly line.

Traditionally 17-18 per cent of the total manpower is on the final assembly line, which is one reason everybody fights to have it. Kracht was determined to produce the Airbus on only one assembly line and to reduce the man-hours spent



KLM's second A310 undergoing final assembly earlier this year in Toulouse



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on this line as much as possible. This way he could convince the partners it was not worthwhile to invest so much money to construct an assembly line for so few man-hours.

He obtained the reluctant German and British agreement to go with only one assembly line in Toulouse when he succeeded in reducing assembly-line man-hours to only 4 per cent.

'We chose Toulouse for several reasons. Aerospatiale already had a large modern installation here. There is a big airspace and a modern airport with very little traffic. And the weather is better than in Northern Europe. I must say that I only

succeeded after many big fights with my German countrymen.

'Then we broke down components between the different partners and looked into means of transporting them. From the very beginning I had the idea to have them all shipped by air. Everybody objected and said it would be too expensive.'

NASA was already using a funny-looking fat airplane called the Guppy, named after a funny-looking fat fish, to fly stages of big Saturn booster rockets — which powered the moon-bound Apollo spacecraft — from Seattle and Long Beach to Cape Canaveral. It was built to

contain a big prefabricated section with a lot of air inside, perfect for Kracht's requirement. Since it was already flying for NASA, Kracht assumed it had certification, and he ordered two of them. But then he learned it was authorized to fly only inside the US and the Americans were rather upset when they learned their airplane would be flying under a French flag. So when it came time to assemble the first Airbus... no Guppy.

Kracht smiles remembering it: 'We shipped this big tin box from Bordeaux to Toulouse by road. It took the convoy three and a half weeks. We had to stop all



The original 'Guppy' — named after a fish

“Why doesn't
KLM shout about its
new Airbus?”

“With a 70%
cut in engine noise,
they're obviously trying
to keep it quiet.”



Starting November '83 KLM will introduce its new Airbuses A310
on major European and Near Eastern routes.

The Reliable Airline



other traffic. In front was a company of men cutting back trees, electricians cut high-tension lines and reconnected them afterwards. What a circus! Everybody enjoyed it, even the local population. But it would not have been so funny if we had to do that every week and the costs were astronomical. But then the Guppies arrived and so far we've shipped sections for 240 aircraft and have not had one single penny's worth of damage. Our people load the sections into the Guppies, our people unload them. No dockers, no railroad workers, no accidents, no strikes. Our production system for the Airbus, while it might seem odd at first glance, has a solid, economical, industrial and social base compatible with the European situation.'

According to Roger Beteille, airplanes are expensive and bought by companies and groups often with government subsidies.

'Foreigners often cannot buy airline stock,' he says. Banks who finance aircraft manufacturers often also finance airlines. In the past the US industry was just about monopolistic and they are fighting to keep that monopoly. Also the most profitable routes in the States are the transcontinental routes and in the past these routes were not considered proper for two-engine aircraft. Now, however, Eastern, our only US customer, services routes like Atlanta-Seattle with the Airbus because of its superior technology and more efficient operating costs.'

I asked Beteille if only two engines caused psychological problems with passengers.

'I don't think so,' he said: 'Five or six years ago a survey was made by an American airline, I won't say the name but it was, shall we say, Boeing-oriented. One question was "Would you prefer to fly in a two, three or four engine plane?" Of course the answer was four. If they had the option of six, they would have said six. But the airline's chairman saw that the question was badly phrased. He added the question: "How many engines does the airplane you are flying in have?" There were less than 25 correct answers.'

I doubt if most people even know the name of the plane they are flying in, let alone how many engines it has. The only consideration is that it must be safe, reliable, comfortable and efficient.'

By the end of 1982, 200 Airbuses were in service with 32 operators. With its digital computerized landing system, the Airbus A310 approaching a runway on one engine can, with the touch of a button, pull up and away again from an altitude of only twelve feet. From nose to tail the Airbus is a technologically advanced aircraft, nothing new for Europe but with one vital difference - it is also competitive and multi-national, a product of collaborative research, design and production. ■

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