

Armed guards in the air

KLM courts online bookings

DUTCH carrier, KLM, has announced it plans to boost Internet sales to 40 per cent of total sales within three years. Currently, web bookings account for 11 per cent of ticket sales for the airline.

The carrier, which revised its profit forecast for 2002 after low traffic volumes in December, is also expected to announce its membership of the Skyteam alliance soon. If this happens, the news will be a disappointment for British Airways, which had wanted KLM to join Oneworld. □

A bill that gives approval for US commercial pilots to carry guns in the cockpit of their aircraft, in order to protect themselves against intruders or hijackers, was signed by President Bush last year. Pilots had been campaigning for the move since the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is in charge of implementing the legislation and is currently addressing issues such as how to train pilots and which types of armoury to use. The earliest that pilots are expected to be armed is by the end

of spring, according to a spokesman at the TSA.

The carrying of guns in aircraft is likely to become more common, as a number of other countries have already adopted the policy of using armed "sky marshalls". Undercover guards, armed with low velocity firearms that can kill but do not damage the aircraft's fuselage, have been trained in Australia and are currently awaiting deployment on airlines. In January, China announced it was employing 2,000 specially trained police officers to work on domestic flights. And, according to a press report, the

British government is also considering moves to put armed undercover police on flights.

Some airlines, such as El Al in Israel, have used armed security guards on flights for years. Saudi Arabian Airlines' guards were reported to have foiled an attempted hijack from Sudan to Jeddah in October last year.

Meanwhile, in Russia, a unique breed of dog has been trained to sniff out and locate guns and grenades in luggage. The cross-breed of a Siberian husky and a jackal has been called the world's greatest sniffer dog by Russian carrier, Aeroflot. □

Scandinavian low-cost flights

SCANDINAVIAN carrier, SAS, is launching its own low-fare service at the end of March. The as-yet-unnamed carrier will start flying from Denmark and Sweden, with plans for flights from Norway to be added in the future.

The new carrier's destinations from Copenhagen will include Alicante, Athens, Bologna, Lis-

bon, Malaga, Mallorca, Pristina and Sarajevo, while its Stockholm services will fly to Alicante, Athens, Barcelona, Bologna, Budapest, Dublin, Istanbul, Malaga, Nice, Prague and Rome.

"We [will] offer only one-way trips, one class [and] no advanced booking rules," said Eva-Karin Dahl at SAS. □

Single sky for Europe

THE European Union (EU) has agreed to unify air traffic control management and passenger compensation payments, paving the way for a "single sky" in Europe and an end to each country controlling their own airspace. If the move is agreed by the European Parliament, the new system will be in place by the end of 2004.

EU Transport Commissioner, Loyola de Palacio, said, "This is a new, spectacular step ahead. Strengthening the rights of air passengers will also help to restore their confidence in air travel." The new system is hoped to ease congestion in the skies and improve safety by opening up more direct routes for aircraft. □

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● Belgium-based carrier **Virgin Express** posted a 50 per cent increase in third quarter profits last year. The carrier has the highest passenger turnover at Brussels Airport, which makes Brussels the first main airport in Europe to have a low-cost carrier as the market leader. Meanwhile, fellow Belgian airline, **SN Brussels**, is code-sharing with British Airways on flights from Brussels to London Heathrow and Gatwick.

● **American Airlines** is looking to European routes to increase its revenue this summer. Two new routes are being launched from its base at New York's JFK airport to Rome and Barcelona. "Continental Europe has remained one of the stronger travel markets," said Daniel P Garton at American. Two additional services to Paris and Tokyo are being planned for Dallas/Fort Worth in June.

● **Swiss** has been granted permission to develop code-share and marketing strategies with American Airlines. The regulatory approval is welcome news for Swiss, which had hoped to join the Oneworld alliance until the alliance indicated that it was not seeking members.

● The **European Commission** has ordered that Greek carrier, Olympic Airways, pays back its government aid of €194 million (US\$182 million). The Greek government says it will appeal about the decision, but if the decision is upheld, there is speculation that Olympic Airways could collapse.

● **EasyJet** is expanding its UK services with a new base at Newcastle planned this year and new flights from London to Alicante, Barcelona and Belfast Interna-

tional to start in March. Services to Prague, Paris and Bristol will also be added in August.

● **US Airways**, which is being restructured under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, has applied to start services between Philadelphia and Dublin and Shannon in Ireland. The airline is seeking to launch daily flights between May and October. Meanwhile, fellow US carrier, **United Airlines**, is expected to file for Chapter 11 itself, after the US government rejected its application for a US\$1.8 billion loan.

● According to the **International Air Transport Association** (IATA), up to US\$50 million in fuel cost savings is likely to be achieved by air route changes between Asia and Europe, negotiated between 21 countries, airlines and military agencies.

● Another low-cost airline is joining the no-frills market, adding to the plethora of carriers already operating in the sector. **Air Scotland** is launching its services from Prestwick in Scotland, joining Ryanair, Buzz, FlyGlobespan and Loco, which all operate out of the west coast airport in the UK. Air Scotland will be run by a Glasgow-based tour operator, flying chiefly to holiday destinations in Europe.

● **British Airways** is ending air services from Leeds/Bradford and Cardiff airports and axing several routes from other regional airports, such as Newcastle and Belfast, in an effort to simplify its regional UK operation. At the same time, three new routes are being launched from London City Airport. The new services, to Paris, Frankfurt and Glasgow, begin in April.