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Lessor sees A380 as future freighter

Amedeo envisages cargo conversions beyond 2025 and that modification could incorporate novel internal lift system

A380 leasing specialist Amedeo believes an A380 passenger-to-freighter (PTF) conversion could be developed a decade from now, and it may use an internal lift system for loading containers to each deck rather than conventional maindeck doors.

The London-based lessor has 20 A380s on order and has also built a portfolio of in-service aircraft through sale/leaseback deals. Chief executive Mark Lapidus says Amedeo “definitely sees a possibility” for the development of a PTF conversion programme for the superjumbo which, as a cargo aircraft, would have three decks.

“We’ve looked at putting in two cargo doors. However, there are some new ideas about having internal lift systems,” he says.

“If there was ever an aircraft where that could work, that would be the A380. That would be more efficient in the A380 than other systems.”

LCF Conversions, which is headed by former BAE Systems executive Cliff Duke, has proposed a freight conversion for the Airbus A340 that uses the standard belly hold freight doors and incorporates a pair of internal

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MARK LAPIDUS
Chief executive, Amedeo

cargo lifts forward and aft to transfer payload between the lower and main decks. If such a modification was adopted for the A380, it would eliminate the need for bespoke ground-handling equipment to service the upper deck.

“We haven’t seriously looked at it yet because it would be in the 2025 timeframe, but we’re looking



Airbus dropped the A380F (above), but a cargo variant may become a reality through conversions

with sufficient interest at the idea to create, in its ‘third life’, a volumetric [conversion] which would be interesting to UPS and FedEx to carry large [amounts] of packages,” says Lapidus.

By “third life”, Lapidus means that he envisages when early-build A380s return off lease towards the end of this decade, they would spend a second lease term in the passenger role before becoming cargo conversion candidates around 10 years from now.

Lapidus is confident that a market for second-hand passenger A380s will emerge as the early-build aircraft return off lease: “When A380s start coming back from their initial lease periods, then the market where they could be operated [as passenger aircraft] will have grown by 50-100%,” he says. “The placement of A380s that will be coming back in five, seven, 10 or 12 years’ time will be very liquid and very attractive.”

Airbus originally offered a conventional new-build A380-800

freighter for which it secured launch orders from FedEx, UPS, Emirates and ILFC for 27 aircraft. However, after running into production problems during

the mid-2000s, Airbus abandoned the freighter variant to concentrate its resources on resolving the issues with the passenger model. ■

ACQUISITIONS Market maker spies early opportunity

Amedeo expects to establish itself as the primary leasing specialist for Airbus A380s and will look to expand its portfolio through the acquisition of second-hand aircraft as their initial lease terms expire.

The London-based lessor has 20 A380s on order for delivery from late 2016 and is also involved in 12 aircraft in the Emirates fleet that were financed through the UK market between 2010 and 2013. “We’re either asset manager or have oversight of those 12 aircraft,” says Amedeo chief executive Mark Lapidus.

As Amedeo looks to place the new-build aircraft it has on order, it is also evaluating ways to remarket second-hand A380s. But Lapidus

says that this does not just apply to the Emirates aircraft: “We have in mind all of the A380s that may be coming back [off lease] from any operator, whether they are managed by us currently or not, because we see ourselves as a market maker with vast opportunities to deal with returning aircraft in terms of knowing where they can be deployed, having Airbus agreements that allow us to reconfigure aircraft inexpensively.”

Amedeo could acquire A380s as their initial lease terms end. The first batch of aircraft to become available will be the early deliveries to Singapore Airlines, due to return in 2018. ■