English eccentric takes on Boeing: The English are known in Europe - and possibly further afield - for their eccentricities. But if not quite a mad inventor, there is certainly a new personality in cargo conversions. Cliff Duke, CEO of LCF Conversions, has burst onto the market with a new idea, which he says will make future conversions cheaper. His version of a converted freighter without a main deck cargo door, which has been covered in past issues of Cargo Facts, became the subject of some debate at the Freighters World conference, where he talked his way onto a panel with Boeing and EADS. His main point, that the airframes already exist and can be converted without much cost, certainly was an appealing prospect to many struggling freighter operators. “I thought at first it was a bonkers idea,” said one delegate. “But actually, it makes a lot of sense.” One delegate from an OEM was, perhaps unsurprisingly, much less sure. “I don’t think it can work. And what if the lift breaks down?”

But Duke’s point is fairly simple. If the technology and design works – which he promises it will – the cost saving will be enormous. He points out that Boeing’s cost target for converting a 777 is some $32 million, which Duke claims would likely rise to about $40 million in the four years it would take to complete, while Airbus says an A340 won’t cost more than $20 million, and will take three years to develop. LCF, on the other hand, promises to complete a conversion in just one year from launch, and claims the cost would be $10 million for a 777 and $6.5 million for an A340. Significant savings in current climes.