

# Avanti Air

After a “horrible winter”, ERA member airline Avanti Air (last profiled in the June 2006 issue of *Regional International*) is hoping that at last the worst of the economic downturn is in the past. Markus Baumann, co-founder of the airline (the other founder is Stefan Kissinger), says things are looking up now – as shown by its decision to lease two addition ATRs (ATR 42-500 models) in June.

Although named Avanti Air it is in fact a German company – ‘Avanti Air’ came about because one of the first aircraft it ever managed was a Piaggio Avanti 180. The airline is based at Siegerland Airport (half way between Cologne and Frankfurt), having relocated from Frankfurt in 2000, and over the years it has also operated Beech King Airs, a Citation II, a Hawker 800, Beech 1900Cs/Ds and ATR 42/72s.

## History

“We started in 1994,” says Baumann. “In the beginning we just managed some business aircraft and because we had more and more requests for groups of up to 20 people, we looked for larger aircraft. Also, the business aircraft market was already crowded. So we rented a Beech 1900C.”

Within “a few weeks” the company was awarded a contract from a drilling company working for Shell in the North Sea – to fly between Norway and Aberdeen. “That was the beginning of the current episode for Avanti. We ended up with two more 1900s (1900Ds), renting and then finally purchasing them.” says Baumann. The last of these left the fleet at the end of 2008, he adds.

“We did lots of ACMI [Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance & Insurance] flights for European carriers like Air Wales [now defunct], and we did lots of crew shuttles, for example for Britannia. But the market for these 19-seaters doesn’t exist any more – it doesn’t make sense now as they cost the same as an ATR.”

Baumann says that “after 9/11 it was clear that the market wouldn’t be the



Avanti Air is delighted that it recently passed IATA's IOSA safety and operations audit. Although it has not received official acknowledgement from IATA yet, this is expected very soon. “I can mention that we passed,” says co-founder Markus Baumann. “This was a huge step for a small airline and is not very common within the ACMI operator community.” Pictured: Avanti Air ATR 72.

same any more – so we looked for a new aircraft type. We got an ATR 42, which is common in Europe, and has good support as we’re close to the manufacturer. We purchased our first one, a -300 model, from Eurowings.

## Why the ATR?

“We didn’t intend to sell our own tickets – we thought that we were too small and that we would only end up losing money. We were looking for new customers and got a contract with Meridiana [based Olbia on the island of Sardinia, Italy] to operate PSO routes. It was strange that we had an Italian name from the beginning.

“The problem was, we had no aircraft to do that – we were on short notice in April 2004 and they were begging for us to start operating, because another (Italian) operator had let them down. We had the contract so started doing it with an MD80.

“This is what made us go for ATRs – as it is a 365 day-a-year, 24 hours-a-day operation,” says Baumann.

Avanti Air still operates routes for Meridiana – a measure of the success of the relationship. It has up to three ATR 42s in operation there at any one time (there are two there at present), and at times also assigns its ATR 72 (acquired in 2005) to the contract.

The airline now has four aircraft on its own AOC [Air Operator’s Certificate]: two ATR 42-500s, one ATR 42-300, and one ATR 72-200. “And we still own two 42-300s which we lease to a Norwegian airline [Helitrans, based at Trondheim Airport]. They are currently on a dry lease for two years,” says Baumann. In fact, the ATR-500s only joined the fleet

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in June this year and were assigned to the Meridiana contract, thus freeing up the -300s to be dry leased to Helitrans. This compares with its fleet four years ago (at the time of the last profile in this journal) of one Beech 1900C, two Beech 1900Ds, two ATR 42-300s and one ATR 72-200 (again, six aircraft), but effectively the fleet has been 're-grown' after the airline let its Beech 1900s go.

### Through the storm

"Last winter was horrible," says Baumann, "but now the market has changed a little bit and some are thinking of doing regional operations again, but with turboprops as oil prices are higher. It is possible that we'll add aircraft but for the time being we have nothing planned." However the airline is building up momentum again, with "close to 80 employees again now," says Baumann. "We have 4.5-5 crew per aircraft, which is high because the schedule is very time consuming with aircraft not [generally] operating from their home base. So we have to position crews a lot – which costs in terms of productivity."

Baumann says that the Meridiana contract has now been extended to the end of next winter (2010/11 season)

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and at the moment has gone from three to two aircraft. "The contract is always changing and being extended, depending on their routes and operation. We operate the PSO routes that they can't do with their MD80s and Airbuses."

Line and base maintenance of Avanti's aircraft is handled by Rheinland Air Service (RAS), which is based in Mönchengladbach, Germany. "They support us wherever we go, for example when our ATR 72 was with Bangkok Airways for six months," says Baumann, who adds: "Now we are doing an interesting contract in Friedrichshafen and between March and May we did some Air Berlin routes. RAS supports us all the time in these."

By way of competition, Avanti Air sees [fellow ERA member] Danish Air Transport as one of its main rivals "But we're friendly as we've known each other for many years – we help each other with aircraft, sub-chartering, and have a good exchange of information too."

### Why ERA?

Baumann is an active member of the ERA Operations Work Group (OPSWG) and says that ERA membership is valuable in terms of keeping abreast of important issues. "We are very small and the laws and regulations are very complicated. We have only a handful of people in the management of the AOC, and of all the background work. For example I oversee security and operations in person."

He also says: "A lot of things are discussed at the meetings that we would not be aware of if we just sat in our offices. Also I had lots of help also from the Industry Affairs department in regard to ETS [the EU Emissions Trading System]. We found that because we use other airlines' call signs we are operating for the payer [of ETS levies] – but it wasn't easy to find that out." ■



Avanti Air leased two ATR 42-500s in June to use on PSO (Public Service Obligation) routes with Meridiana of Sardinia. This freed up its two (owned) ATR 42-300s for a lease to Helitrans of Norway. Pictured: ATR 72-200