

A-Viator turboprop revamp on track for service in 2011

Manufacturer set to produce three examples of updated stretch of P68 piston twin next year

Italian light aircraft manufacturer Vulcanair is on track to begin deliveries of its revamped A-Viator turboprop by the end of 2011 after replacing the flightdeck of its 1990s forerunner – and, despite no firm orders, says sales prospects for the rugged 11-seat utility are strong in South-East Asia and Australasia.

The A-Viator is a Rolls-Royce 250B17C-powered stretch of the P68 piston twin, and Vulcanair will exhibit its demonstrator at Australia's Avalon air show in March before going on to showcase the aircraft in India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea.

The Naples-based company hopes to manufacture three A-Viators in 2011. "We are confident we can deliver at least 10 a year after that," says sales director and co-owner Remo de Feo. Prices start at \$2.3 million.

Family-owned Vulcanair – named in honour of nearby Vesuvius – bought the rights to the P68 and the recently certificated A-Viator, as well as the factory and other assets of defunct Parte-



The revamped A-Viator, with new flightdeck, will go on tour in Asia

navia, in 1998. Since then, the company has delivered about 80 P68s, split equally between the Observer surveillance version of the aircraft and P68C model.

Output of the \$760,000-1.2 million aircraft stands at about 12-15 a year. A VR variant, with retractable landing gear, is the latest addition.

The P68 has been a stalwart of companies working in mining, forestry and other sectors operating in hard-to-access regions, says de Feo. The high-wing, 3,000kg (6,614lb) maximum take-off weight A-Viator, which will be

recertificated with a glass cockpit and autopilot, extends the brand to those who need a larger cabin and more power.

Potential markets, says de Feo, include night-time cargo operators and companies or militaries working in conflict zones. The aircraft can also be fitted with twin cameras or sensors for surveillance. "We have discovered a lot of interest in the irregular warfare market," he adds.

Although unpressurised, the aircraft is a "perfect replacement" for ageing utilities such as the Cessna 402, says de Feo. ■