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Air Nostrum's CEO Carlos Bertomeu
on the carrier's 30 years in business



From alpha to omega

MRO specialist Vallair is a company with an ambitious five-year plan. LARA visited its Chateauroux facility to find out more.

Mature aircraft and engine MRO specialist, Vallair, is a company with plans to grow and consolidate its offering to operators and lessors.

Part of Aérocentre, a Centre-Val de Loire group of aerospace engineering companies and research centres, Vallair is a key player in a cluster which seeks to sustain and develop the aeronautical sector in the region – making it a leader in France’s aeronautics industry.

The last three to four years have heralded a positive shift for the company, with activity turning towards its external airline customers and promoting its services as a “one stop shop”, from aircraft maintenance to teardown.

Its Chateauroux facility stands as the jewel in the crown of its MRO offering. Since 2022, the site has received considerable investment and undergone sweeping changes to boost its service offering and

meet the demands of a once again buoyant aviation sector.

The site itself comprises two hangars: Hangar One, where the aerostructures and engine MRO shop is based; and Hangar Two, at Marcel Dassault Airport, dedicated to aircraft maintenance.

The aerostructures facility completed its update and build in 2024, where it now houses a fully integrated aerostructure repair and engine teardown and component repair facility.

The latter, Hangar Two, is a state-of-the-art 8,520 square metre hangar, affectionately known as “The Cathedral”. Built in 2022, it is equipped for A330 maintenance, and the hangar can accommodate up to five A321s, two A330 widebodies, or a mixture of both aircraft types.

Now, with several milestones under its belt in the last two years, Vallair’s reputation is on the rise.

Vallair offers an integrated aerostructure repair and engine teardown and component repair facility.

ON THE MAP

At present, Vallair has over 30 different customers from a range of airlines and lessors, typically those with smaller fleets.

Reflecting on how far the business has come, François Fermat, Sales and Business Development Manager – Aerostructures and Engines, notes that Vallair’s recent work with several major airlines was really what put it on the map.

The company is working closely with several major airlines and has scheduled maintenance worksopes for A320/A330 family and B737 family at its facilities in Chateauroux and Montpellier.

Fermat confirms that working with larger operators is a goal they would like to lock in as a permanent contract in the future.

“We’d like to put in place a power by the hour contract with a big company,” he says. “But for the moment we try to focus on the smaller companies, those with a maximum of 10 aircraft.”

One of the ongoing aims for the company is to boost its reputation as a go-to MRO for the life cycle of a part.

While OEMs largely dominate the marketplace as the place for airlines to send a part or aircraft for maintenance and repair, long lead times and supply chain issues mean that MROs like Vallair are ready and waiting to step in to help – offering



services to airlines that are looking elsewhere for MRO services.

However, this increase in OEMs building their own component repair shops is a level of competition which confronts Vallair, particularly as the company positions itself as the sole provider of part repairs.

But Fermaut says Vallair can provide a cost-effective solution for operators.

“Due to the issue with OEMs, and problems of cost with some types of parts, they [operators] are more and more open to review of some parts. We focus on the customer request, and I think it’s something the OEMs forget.”

The upgrade of its aerostructure facility, and addition of the engine shop, has helped to streamline the MRO’s processes.

Now Vallair can offer operators a full range of capabilities when it comes to the repair, maintenance and dismantling of their aircraft.

“To have the engine shop close to the dismantling area means we can start straight away with the inspection and repair of the part,” says Fermaut. “It’s the reason we put this shop [upgrade] in place.”

It also means that unnecessary movement of parts from teardowns is avoided – ultimately speeding up turnaround times and keeping processes as cost efficient as possible.

The life cycle of larger parts is also sustained, where they might have otherwise been scrapped.

ENGINES AND EMBRAER

As part of the aerostructure and engine facility upgrade at

Chateauroux, the MRO has been working on developing the business and its work with older engine types.

With high demand for the maintenance and repair of older engines, such as the CFM56 and the V2500, Vallair has plenty of work coming through the doors.

It has also recently implemented capabilities for borescope inspections, widening the type of MRO services it can offer operators, alongside its engine storage and dismantling services.

Fermaut says: “We want to work on the -7 [CFM56-7B] in the future, as we feel there are a lot of opportunities. But for dismantling, we’re focused on the [CFM56] -5A and -5B now.

“We don’t want to go too fast for the moment. We’ll focus on the dismantling of engines. After that, we will see what kind of support we can do [for operators] in the future.”

He adds: “We’re more focused, for now, on the V2500 and the Trent 700, as it’s where you have more demand in the market. We have a really high value for that part.”

Airlines extending their fleets to cope with manufacturers’ backlogs is likewise a positive turn of events for the MRO company.

While Vallair is still “very much focused” on providing MRO support and teardowns for the 737, A320 and A330 aircraft, the potential for dismantling regional jets – such as Embraer 145s – is not far off.

Fermaut says: “At the moment there’s a lot of demand for Embraer 145 parts on the

market, although there’s no dismantling of this aircraft in Europe for now. But we know there is interest in the market – a gap – and that some parts already sell.”

Of all the major challenges facing Vallair – be it the lack of available parts to aircraft backlogs – the company is managing to grow sustainably.

The target, Vallair says, is to multiply the turnover by two to three times within the next four years, the 2024 budget being set at €8 million.

MAKING SPACE

While its latest hangar stands as a necessary addition to the Chateauroux complex, Vallair is rapidly growing, with a historic foundation – one that comes with its own restrictions.

“That means we need more space, more people, more tooling,” says Fermaut, noting the company’s work on the A330 aircraft. “The challenge [for the next year] is to reorganise production, to face up to this issue.”

François Biarneix, Vallair’s recently appointed Operations Director, adds: “We want to improve this area. To improve the layout of the facility, or to perhaps extend.”

The company’s work on the widebody A330 – an aircraft with larger parts than the narrowbodies it is used to working on – combined with the fact that its aerostructures facility is an historical building with walls and a roof that cannot be touched, means that the business needs to come up with more space, and find better



Vallair has recently upgraded its aerostructure facility and added an engine shop.

ways to utilise pre-existing structures.

However, Vallair is thinking of ways to best manage the pre-existing space in the original warehouse to fit around this growing demand and futureproof the business and facilities for the next 10 years.

Biarneix confirms that Vallair is in discussions to find extra storage facilities and keep its aerostructures hangar a place primarily for production.

The company is also utilising LEAN tools and improving logistics to streamline the movements of parts from teardown to storage on site, particularly with those parts that require special crating or are too difficult to move from one facility to another.

A GROWING ENTERPRISE

One crucial aspect of Vallair's team and operations, which arguably distinguishes them from larger MROs and OEMs, is that they are aware of not overstressing themselves – making sure to deliver on smaller inspections or repair work to the highest quality before committing to much larger projects.

Fermat cites the company's recent work with major airlines since the start of the year as an example of this.

"We start with a small event," he says, "We start with A-checks and small repairs and inspections, like a lightning-strike inspection."

Then, as customers are "more and more happy with the quality of service [Vallair] provides", this important initial work naturally leads to further discussions for Vallair to take on more complex work – such as larger inspections and phase-out work for airlines that will continue in the new year.

"We want to do what we are sure that we can do," says Fermat. "We want to be able to work with them [airlines] to answer their requests."

However, with an ever-expanding business comes the need for hiring and training a large workforce, as well as optimising the staff present on site.



Vallair has more than 30 different customers – and has recently started to carry out work for larger airlines.

That's where François Biarneix's work comes in. Having previously worked at Airbus, the Operations Director is no stranger to managing large, often complex operations.

So what benefits come from airlines approaching an MRO like Vallair?

"Flexibility, for sure," Biarneix says. "Decision-making is very short – if there's a focus point, I can ask Gregoire [the CEO] immediately. We are very close to our team, and know what's going on in our workshops."

Building a reputation is also important to the MRO, not just with its customers but in the local area too.

"I try to promote Vallair in Chateauroux," says Biarneix. "It's important to be known, important for the local economy. But it's also important to engage employees."

Vallair is keen to invest in the future – not just of its site, but the people who might one day work there. It has invested heavily in the Centre-Val de Loire Region, partnering with the Aircraft Academy and other schools and colleges in the local region.

It has its Aircraft Academy facilities on site, which is dedicated to training up aircraft engineers and mechanics with both practical and theoretical EASA Part 147 training. It also has e-learning training for

future engineers and mechanics from countries such as China to access.

In 2022, Vallair announced a goal to train more than 300 mechanics over the next five years, and in July 2024, the company signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the College de Paris to collaborate on a range of aeronautical skills training and development programmes.

There are also ongoing plans to add and offer student-level training for the EASA Part 66 licence to its roster.

"It's been very, very busy," says Armel Jezequel, the CEO of Aircraft Academy. He says the academy has been seeing lots of inquiries from overseas students – in particular from India, the Philippines and Taiwan.

More recently, the academy signed an MOU in July with the Cameroon Civil Aviation Authority to provide aeronautical training, maintenance and recycling.

Convincing people to take up the opportunities, to address the skills shortage, remains a constant challenge.

"We have to adapt on a daily basis," says Jezequel.

But nevertheless, looking ahead, improving presents the company with "a good opportunity and a good market." ■

