



The region's biggest cargo fleet is here to stay, Jassim Al Bastaki tells Kathryn Semcow

You could say all-cargo carrier Midex Airlines entered the market at one of the worst times in aviation history. When it launched its first flight from the Al Ain Airport in June 2008, fuel prices were high as ever and airlines around the world were wondering if they could survive. But Jassim Al Bastaki, Director General, hardly looks bothered. "Once you give a commitment to the market that you are flying to, you have to fly," he says. "You have to take a risk. You have to pay from your own pocket in the beginning."

And he is hardly bothered by the current global cash shortage either. "Our aircrafts are 100 per cent owned by the company," he says. "We don't

have the cost of leasing. The other airlines in the UAE lease their aircraft, so their overhead is too high. This will push them to go out of the market, or at least to reduce their fleets."

The company he is referring to is Midex International Group, said to be the world's fifth largest integrator. It is the agent for clients such as La Poste, Royal Mail, Swiss Post, ABX in Belgium and Chronopost; and turns over approximately US\$5.44 billion a year. "The idea is to build an airline to help and support the express courier business," says Al Bastaki.

Midex set up its airline in the UAE with the government of Abu Dhabi's blessing and encouragement to make

use of Al Ain Airport. "So many people ask, 'Why did you choose Al Ain?'," says Al Bastaki. "Al Ain Airport is not in an economic city, but from a technical and operational point of view, it is one of the most recommended airports."

He also likes the airport's proximity to Dubai. "If I will use Sharjah Airport, for example, I will need four to five hours just to reach the airport and take my cargo. But Al Ain is a maximum of two hours driving by truck."

"There is no traffic right now in Al Ain, so as a carrier, I think that is a positive," he adds. "Plus, Al Ain is very close to Oman, only one hour from Sohar Port on the Indian Ocean."

Al Ain's dry weather is also a bonus. "There is no fog during winter seasons, so there is no way your aircraft will be delayed," he says.



Jassim Al Bastaki, Director General, Midex

Midex currently has six Airbus A300B4-203Fs and one Boeing B747-200F based in Al Ain. It also has seven 747s based at its hub in Orly, which it operates on dry lease. "Today, Midex Airlines has one of the biggest fleets in the region," says Al Bastaki.

He says the company is considering moving two of its Orly planes to

Al Ain. "Internationally, other regions aren't doing so well, but the Middle East is still booming."

And he seems to think this will continue. "We are negotiating now to buy another 747-400," he says.

Al Bastaki says Midex now has scheduled flights to Bombay, Madras, Dhaka, Colombo, Beirut, Da-

mascus, Hann and, of course, Orly. It trucks cargo from Orly to the rest of Europe, and relies on agreements with North American carriers to move it across the Atlantic. Since June, it has operated 150 scheduled flights and moved around 11,000 tonnes of cargo to Europe. Al Bastaki says the company also has plans to start chartering soon.

Although faced with a dramatic economy, Al Bastaki says dropping any of these routes is nowhere in his plans. "Once you bridge this period, you will be there in the market, because you have shown the big cargo companies that you are committed, that you have your big aircraft flying on time," he says. "Once you think you need to drop services a bit, or stop services a bit, you will lose your client. You need to keep going on, moving forward." 🌅