



Marco Finelli
experiences flying
with a small carrier
using Czech Let 410
turboprops.

Nestling just off the coast of Tuscany on the western side of Italy is the island of Elba. It is a popular holiday destination for both Italian and Central European visitors who enjoy the quiet surroundings. Its only airfield, at Marina di Campo, has a single 3,114ft (949m) Runway 16/34 and is located in the south of the island on the only suitable piece of flat land available. The local terrain means that arrivals and departures are from and to the south while arrivals from the north are only permitted in good weather. The short runway means restrictions on the size of visiting aircraft with 50-seaters being, realistically, the maximum.

Island Links

In the summer of 2012, seasonal flights were operated by three carriers: InterSky of Austria, SkyWork of Switzerland and ElbaFly (operated by Czech carrier Silver Air). All have now stopped scheduled services for the winter. Silver Air flies on behalf of Swiss general sales agent Cityline which is headed by Dina Peverelli. For the past couple of years, she has been trying to create public service obligation (PSO) routes to Florence and Pisa on the Italian mainland for the benefit of the islanders, but they have yet to be approved by the local and national authorities. The plan was to create links for the islanders during the working week – most of the seasonal flights are operated at the weekend.

From mid-June to early September, Silver Air carried over 1,100 passengers from Milan/Malpensa (MXP). It plans to restart links in May 2013. Five flights per week were flown on a single route to MXP – the 2011 service to Milan/Bergamo was discontinued due to low passenger loads while today, economic turmoil in the Eurozone had led to tourist numbers dwindling, with the head of the local Elba hotels association reporting a downturn of about 20% this year. Silver Air also flies sightseeing trips around the Tuscan archipelago with a 35-minute flight costing €88. *Airliner World* joined the carrier on Elba to see how a small but important service like this is conducted. >>

Silver Air

Opening the skies for Elba



Main image • Just after take-off from Elba – the scenic beauty and coastline of the island. Silver Air's aircraft carries 'Fly to Elba – Tuscan Island' titles on the forward fuselage.



Captain Jaroslav Man and First Officer Filip Schlesinger prepare the load sheet in the terminal prior to the flight.

Above right - Once checked in, passengers go outside the terminal to wait for the flight.



Elba-Milan Malpensa

The terminal at Marina di Campo Airport is very small, but the building does have all the relevant facilities including a single baggage belt and the necessary security procedures. After check-in, passengers have to wait outside in a sheltered area until ready for boarding (when the security check is carried out). From an area to the side of the building they can see the aircraft, Let 410UVP, OK-SLD (c/n 902503), parked on the apron.

After arriving at the airport, the crew for the flight, Captain Jaroslav Man and First Officer Filip Schlesinger, collect the data about how many passengers are on the flight to Milan – and the quantity



and weight of baggage to be carried – to prepare the load sheet before walking the short distance to the aircraft. They join the stewardess, Italian-speaker Isabelle Bouloir, who has been getting the cabin ready, and Flight Engineer Václav Elznic, who has pre-flighted the aircraft, including refuelling – no underground connections here, just a simple hose similar to that used on a car.

When ready for boarding, the passengers are escorted the short distance from the terminal and take their seats. The cabin has a 'one plus two' internal configuration with no overhead bins, and Isabelle begins her pre-flight emergency briefings including the location of the life-jackets and safety cards. Her last job before departure is to



deliver a fresh glass of water to each of the passengers.

Once the external door is closed, the pilots begin the pre-flight checks and start the starboard Walter M601 turboprop engine first, swiftly followed by the port. Soon afterwards taxi clearance is granted, and it is a short distance to the runway for a backtrack to the threshold of Runway 16. Flaps are set, checks are complete and, with

take-off clearance, power is increased. At rotate speed, Captain Man pulls back on the control yoke and Flight SLD101 is airborne – with the passengers being treated to a scenic view of the island. Initial clearance is via the standard instrument departure (SID) to flight level (FL) 100 (10,000ft) inbound to Elba's VOR navigational beacon. However at 4,000ft, air traffic control requests a left turn to avoid the track of inbound

The rugged coastline of Elba.

Above left - Most of the cockpit instruments are analogue, although there is room for GPS and TCAS.

traffic. When the other aircraft clear, Captain Man resumes the original heading to join the airway system.

Clear skies and good visibility provide excellent views of the small islands of Montecristo, Pianosa and then Capraia before crossing the mainland coast between Genoa and La Spezia. The climb rate is 500ft/min and once level at FL100 the autopilot is engaged achieving a cruising speed of 150kts. Although >>

Silver Air

The carrier started operations in 1995 with a main base at Prague. After operations using Boeing 727s in East Asia, business is now concentrated on regular passenger services as well as charters and cargo on behalf of contractors such as express couriers or government postal services. Currently there are three Lets with different internal layouts in the fleet.

The Let 410 basking in the sunshine at Marina di Campo airfield.

“THE TERMINAL AT MARINA DI CAMPO AIRPORT IS VERY SMALL, BUT THE BUILDING DOES HAVE ALL THE RELEVANT FACILITIES INCLUDING A SINGLE BAGGAGE BELT AND THE NECESSARY SECURITY PROCEDURES.”



“CLEAR SKIES AND GOOD VISIBILITY PROVIDED EXCELLENT VIEWS OF THE SMALL ISLANDS OF MONTECRISTO, PIANOSA AND CAPRAIA.”

The Let is an old design – this aircraft was built in 1990 – with analogue flight instruments, it is also fitted with a Global Positioning System (GPS) with a clear mapping screen and an enhanced traffic collision alert system (TCAS).

The flight is handed over to Milan Radar and the descent starts. Captain Man is a little apprehensive as the

approach speed of the Let is a lot slower than other airliners and he is conscious of not delaying the next in the queue too much. After what can be considered a relatively fast approach for the Czech-built turboprop, the aircraft slows down to land on MXP's Runway 35R and then hastily vacates it after a 69-minute flight. Its parking area to the north of Terminal 1 (see MXP article in last month's *Airliner World*) is normally used for visiting executive jets and airliners parking for a long periods.

The passengers are bussed to the terminal and the crew starts the

Silver Air has been bidding for public service obligation (PSO) routes to Florence and Pisa for the benefit of the islanders but has yet to win government approval.



Passengers board the Let 410 via the single door at the rear.

Far right • Marina di Campo Airport has a single 3,114ft (949m) Runway 16/34 and is located in the south of the island on the only suitable piece of flat land available.

Captain Jaroslav Man, First Officer Filip Schlesinger, Flight Attendant Isabelle Bouloir and Flight Engineer Vaclav Elznic enjoying the evening sunshine at Elba.

turnaround. As the fuel at MXP is up to 40% cheaper than at Elba, the Flight Engineer tops up the tanks to full to avoid refuelling back at Marina di Campo. While this means a higher fuel consumption due to extra weight, it works out cheaper overall for the carrier.

Return to Elba

There is initially a slight delay to the return flight as a passenger has gone 'missing', but as the bus with the others arrives, word comes through that he has checked in and will be brought on a second bus. With refuelling completed and seven bags stored in the hold in the main cabin, the last passenger arrives and the flight is ready to depart. Silver Air is very considerate to its customers: the next flight is not until tomorrow

and the crew is happy to wait for a short time. Even with the delay, the flight is ready before its planned slot of 18.00. Taxi clearance is requested – it seems very strange to taxi in a relatively small aircraft behind an aircraft the size of an Airbus A330 or Boeing 777, but the crew is used to it. At the holding point for Runway 35L, take-off clearance is obtained and after a short run – compared to the length of the long runway – the aircraft is airborne. A left turn following the Romagnano SID gives the passengers a fine view of the Alps to the north of the airport. Another left

turn inbound to Albenga has the aircraft flying over the Western Padana river basin and the Langhe and Monferrato hills which mark the beginning of the Apennine Mountains.

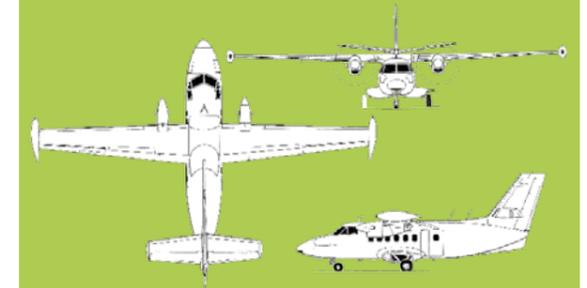
A quiet piece of airspace at the cruising height means that a direct track to the Elba VOR beacon is approved. Thirty minutes later, the descent is started after passing the island of Gorgona and the flight is directed to the west of Marina di Campo airport as there is departing traffic. The weather is good and with the airfield, and the departing traffic, in sight, Captain Man flies a visual approach



Why Let 410s?

Due to the airport's short runway length, the types of aircraft providing links to Elba have historically included Aero Commanders, Britten-Norman BN-2A Islanders, Dornier Do-228s and Piaggio P166s. Today none of these types are in commercial operation in Italy and the only suitable aircraft in the 20-seat category is the Let 410. It offers low

operational costs and technical reliability, has a short take-off and landing (STOL) capability and can land on gravel strips if required. The 15 to 17-seat unpressurised cabin has a door at the rear, while a central pillar at the front separates the passengers from the flight crew, although the cockpit can be seen from each side of the fuselage.



to Runway 34. Despite the short runway, the aircraft stops quickly with a little reverse pitch and turns onto the small apron. Once on the chocks, the engines are shut down and the passengers disembark – most of them to start their summer holidays. **AV**

Thanks to Dina Peverelli (Cityline Swiss commercial department), Barbara Cabras Capo (duty station manager at Elba) and Captain Jaroslav Man and his crew for their support in producing this article.

Inside the cabin of the Let 410. A central column at the front separates the flightdeck from the passengers.

Short finals to Malpensa's Runway 35R. (All photos author)

