

Stelios offers £5m bounty to ground Airbus deal



by **Francesca Washtell**

EASYJET founder **Sir Stelios Haji-ioannou** is offering £5m to anyone who can help him thwart a £4.5bn deal with Airbus.

Stelios's call for whistleblowers to come forward is the latest bizarre turn in a fiery bust-up with Easyjet's board.

He wants the budget airline to cancel an order with Airbus for 107 planes – insisting it can't afford them and that they will not be needed for a long time because of the Covid-19 crisis.

In an open letter, the Greek-Cypriot businessman offered £5m for information that could scupper the deal.

He pleaded for 'current or past hard-working employees or anyone else who has seen anything suspicious by anyone inside Easyjet in their dealings with Airbus' to come forward.

Stelios (*pictured*) is looking for evidence of any untoward behaviour that may have led to Easyjet and Airbus signing the deal – though both firms vigorously deny this was the case.

Stelios said his appeal could also apply to suppliers, Airbus staff and lawyers. He has offered

anonymity and to cover any legal costs. For people with 'quick hints or tips', he is willing to hand over around £10,000. He said: 'We are looking for small tips, anything from lavish entertainment at the Paris Air Show up to the equivalent of the QPR sponsorship fee. Any unexplained wealth or ostentatious spending by Easyjet employees could also give us a hint.'

Stelios launched the airline in 1995 – and he and his family still own 34pc of its shares.

At a shareholders' meeting on May 22, he will attempt to unseat four directors including chairman John Barton and chief executive Johan Lundgren.

Easyjet has delayed delivery of some jets, and has been forced to ground its fleet of 344 jets. It expects to make a £380m loss in the six months to March.

It said it 'firmly rejects any insinuation that Easyjet was involved in any impropriety'. It said a review of the Airbus deal by accountants BDO showed it had followed all the rules.