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SANTA MONICA, Calif., Jan. 9 -- Trans Caribbean Airways, the nation's newest certificated air carrier, today became the 15th airline to order the Douglas DC-8 Jetliner. The new transport will reduce flying time between New York and Puerto Rico to three hours.

Nat Paschall, vice president-sales for Douglas, announced that Trans Caribbean had placed an order for a 176-passenger DC-8 for use on its route between New York and San Juan. Delivery will be made in December of 1960.

The airline already has three new DC-6A transports on order with Douglas and expects to begin scheduled operations on the first of March.

Trans Caribbean's DC-8, to be powered by Pratt & Whitney JT3 turbojet engines, will be delivered in the new "economy class" configuration established by the International Air Transport Association.

Today's order raises the total firm orders for the Douglas Jetliner to 134.

A supplemental carrier for some 10 years, Trans Caribbean received its certificate to operate a scheduled air service on November 15. The certificate is the first to be awarded to a U.S. airline since 1938.