CAPITAL INJECTION BOOSTS ACRO'S LONGHAUL SEAT STRATEGY

News /

Startup seatmaker **Acro** is powering forward in its quest for more sales and market share, with a new £7.75 million (US$11.7 million) investment from venture capital house BGF "to accelerate Acro's product developments". Acro already produces Series 6, a more upscale feeling economy class product based on its existing slimline seat, and is now offering its new Series 7 longhaul premium economy/shorthaul business seat.

Acro CEO Chris Brady is certainly pleased with what the additional investment will enable. "We've worked hard to grow Acro and by investing every scrap we've made in our staff, products and infrastructure we have managed to double the size of the business every year for the past four years, but we still have ambitious plans. Our partnership with BGF will allow us to bring those plans to life, which is hugely exciting," Brady says.

The firm states that in 2015 it delivered over 25,000 of its existing slimline shorthaul seats — including on over 120 aircraft within the United States to Spirit, Frontier, Hawaiian and Allegiant.

Yet that admirable existing product base is both a blessing and a curse for the seatmaker. On the one hand, its excellent economics, light yet sturdy structures and hard-wearing surfaces are a real boon from an economics point of view. Yet on the other, passengers (and some of the travel media) see that the seats debuted on ultra low-cost carriers and paint the entire line with the same brush — in a way that they don't necessarily with B/E Aerospace's Pinnacle seat or Recaro's NEK-

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style series of slimline seats, which are arguably less spacious and comfortable than the Acro seat when pitched similarly.

“Acro’s new Premium Economy seat, ‘Series 7’, is inspired by the best of 20th century furniture design,” the seatmaker says in its release about the investment, and that’s something that Chris Brady was keen to emphasise while speaking with Runway Girl Network at this year’s Aircraft Interiors Expo in Hamburg.

“What we believe about seating is that Charles Eaves and Mies van de Rohe and the mid-twentieth century people were spot on the money. What they have done is an economy of form — suited to our industry for the reasons we have set out — and they pursue simplicity. Unlike my office chair, which has casters and a spike and a gas strut, with legs and ghastly injection molding… Charles Eames doesn’t do that. He takes his DSR chair, polypropylene back, the right shape, no padding, beautifully comfortable. It’s not rigid but it’s not soft. He looks at the Eiffel Tower for inspiration for the legs, and he welds together cold-drawn steel in a beautiful shape that carries the loads and distributes the loads effectively.”

Designer praise aside, new entrants in the seatmaker field are definitely welcome, not least to keep the larger players on their toes. That’s particularly true given the significant amount of consolidation in the industry — which has arguably resulted in overconsolidation and, in the cases of both Zodiac and B/E Aerospace, an inability to deliver products on time, resulting in costly customer delays to entry into service. Virgin Australia’s delayed B/E Aerospace Super Diamond implementation on both its A330 and 777-300ER fleet, and American Airlines’ grounded 787 Dreamliners (which resulted in the airline sacking Zodiac as its business class seatmaker) are just two examples.

Together with relative newcomers like ZIM (notable for premium economy and shorthaul business class seating on Lufthansa, Qantas and others) and existing niche players like AvioInteriors (the Saga Class seatmaker for Icelandair) and Haeco (one of the standard catalogue premium economy providers, including in the Dreamliner catalogue), the path ahead for Acro will be a fascinating one.

Acro shows serious attention to detail on Series 7

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