FINMECCANICA STRESSING LIGHTER PRODUCT OFFERINGS

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Finmeccanica Helicopters is stressing the lighter portion of its portfolio of AW models here at Heli-Expo in the wake of continuing softness in the offshore energy market. “We want to show the versatility of our product portfolio and have invested in new products at the right time that have come to market in a timely fashion. There is a general worry about the oil-and-gas downturn. We started deliveries of the AW169 [medium twin] in 2015 [and that model is] intended to address different market segments, mostly EMS, VIP and other light utilities,” said Stefano Bortoli, Finmeccanica Helicopters senior vice president for sales and strategic sourcing.

Bortoli said he expects the AW169 to receive FAA certification in mid-2016 and noted that the manufacturer already holds orders from 50 customers in 20 countries. Work is proceeding on developing a search-and-rescue variant with Swiss operator Rega, and it will feature a full icing protection system (FIPS). Of the AW169s on order, most have been ordered by helicopter EMS operators; the second largest group of orders is forVIP configurations.

Deliveries of the AW169 began in 2015 after it received EASA approval. Plans call for the model to be manufactured in Italy and at Finmeccanica’s plant in Philadelphia, with deliveries beginning from the latter in 2017.

Finmeccanica will be displaying its new AW Trekker light twin this year. The Trekker is a skidded version of the company’s AW109S Grand. Deliveries of the Trekker are scheduled to begin in the fourth quarter of this year. More than 20 Trekkers were sold in 2015. The aircraft features the same cabin as the Grand and advanced single-pilot-IFR Genesys avionics, but costs less. Bortoli

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called the price difference “meaningful” and said it “will be appreciated by our customers.

The Trekker is powered by a pair of Fadec-equipped Pratt & Whitney Canada PW207C 815-shp engines that deliver a maximum cruise speed of 154 knots. It has a maximum takeoff weight of 7,000 pounds and will have an endurance of four hours, 20 minutes or a 445-nm maximum range with a modular five-cell fuel system. It will be assembled at Finmeccanica’s plant in Philadelphia.

Bortoli said the company planned to announce news regarding the company’s AW119Kx single at the show. Last year Finmeccanica joined with the Bristow Group, Doss Aviation, and Rockwell Collins to develop a turnkey solution using the AW119Kx to address the rotary-wing pilot training needs of the U.S. military and other government customers. The AW119 is assembled in Philadelphia. The AW119Kx features the Garmin G1000Hflight deck system with synthetic vision, moving-map, highway-in-the-sky and obstacle/terrain avoidance systems. U.S.-based Life Flight Network was the launch customer, initially acquiring 15 of the helicopters inEMS configuration.

Finmeccanica will also be displaying the AW 009 light single, the rebranded SW-4 originally developed by Polish airframer PZL-Swidnik beginning in 1981. The design first flew in 1996 and has undergone several refinements since Finmeccanica acquired a majority stake in the company in 2009. Bortoli said recent improvements include new Genesys avionics, an improved hydraulics system and a reduced level of vibration. Bortoli said he is confident Finmeccanica could keep the 009 priced less than $2 million. The 113-knot 009 is powered by the Rolls-Royce 250-C20R/2 and has an mtow of 3,968 pounds.

“The reason we are proposing it under this new name is that we have a business case we consider solid and we are confident we can deliver a product in a price range that is palatable to the market based on a market survey we did in 2015. This is an attractive product and attractive price,” Bortoli said.

Even with the depressed oil-and-gas market, Finmeccanica’s larger helicopter offerings continue to do well. Bortoli noted that the company already had delivered 30 of its AW189 super-medium helicopters including one inVIP configuration to a Middle Eastern customer and that it is working on additional VIP configurations for that model. He characterized early customer comments about the AW189 as “very positive.” Bortoli also said that the medium-twin AW139 continues to sell well, with nearly 800 delivered and 900 sold in a variety of configurations including commercial, military, law enforcement, EMS, VIP and oil-and-gas. Overall the AW139 fleet has amassed more than 1.4 million hours.

Work continues on the AW609 civil tiltrotor program in the wake of the fatal crash of the second prototype Oct. 30, 2015. Flight operations have been stood down on the remaining flyable prototype since the accident, but Bortoli said the company hopes to have it back in the air as early as this month and was continuing work on two additional prototypes, albeit at a slower pace. Its technology-sharing agreement with the Bristow Group, to develop an oil-and-gas/search-and-rescue variant also remained in place. “We are continuing to work on the program,” Bortoli said. “We are very committed to its development. We are continuing to work with the Bristow team. We are confident that once we restart it at full speed and start flying again, the 609 will be our flagship program going forward, but investigations are still ongoing and we have to be respectful of the work being undertaken by the various authorities involved.”

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