GREEN SHOOTS OF RECOVERY FOR THE ROTORCRAFT INDUSTRY

News / Business aviation, Events / Festivals



While the turbulent oil and gas sector continues to remain a dominant issue for the rotorcraft industry, there are signs of an upturn. During the Business Leaders Forum at Helitech International, Waypoint Leasing suggested that the "bottom had been reached", pointing to the fact that it is seeing more contracts up for grabs across the globe.

It comes as welcome news to operators who have seen their businesses reach breaking point over the past year. However, the helicopter leasing company did reserve a word of warning for operators and OEMs. It urged the former to diversify their businesses and the latter not to flood the market with new models at the first sight of a recovery and instead give operators time to absorb the backlog.

During his session, focusing on financing a fleet, Ian Gurekian, Chief Risk Officer of Waypoint Leasing, commented: "The oil and gas sector is not going to disappear, it is just down at the moment. There is certainly a need for the aircraft out there and that will remain. We are, however, always looking at diversifying our business into new sectors, such as HEMS and SAR."

During the same session, AAR Airlift Group told western helicopter operators that they should be looking at the opportunities presented by the financial crisis, particularly through the commercialisation of military and government aircraft.

John Butler, Vice President, Business Development of the AAR Airlift Group, revealed that UN peacekeeping missions represent the biggest growth opportunity, noting that there is between

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$600m-1bn worth of contracts up for tender every year. He also told attendees to learn from the UK and US when it comes to commercialising military helicopters for HEMS and SAR operations, particularly in countries managing huge budget deficits.

Hannu Marjoniemi, VP of Strategy & Finance at Copter Safety, who attended the session said: “The Business Leaders Forum provided valuable insights into the rotorcraft industry. The information presented puts the current outlook into perspective and enables us to confidently plan for the future.”

Another area explored at Helitech International was UAVs. Today, a panel, led by Rolls Royce, discussed how rotorcraft businesses are integrating the hardware and software into their operations.

With UAVs being flown by individuals with little training and experience, Oisin McGrath, CEO of DroneSAR, said that pilots felt “terrified” about potential collisions. He appealed to helicopter operators to collaborate more and see the technology as an asset rather than a threat. Attendees heard how SAR missions can be assisted and ultimately help save lives.

McGrath also highlighted battery power as a key development area for the UAV industry over the coming years, with investments being made in extending the flying time beyond the average 20 minutes. He also revealed that DroneSAR is working on software that will capture terrain, enabling UAVs to land more safely, while a white paper will be launched next week providing details on how to overcome the issues associated with flying and landing in treacherous weather conditions.

On the show floor itself, LORD Corporation announced that it had received FAA DER approval for the optional installation of the tail skid weight on the Bell 206. Operators will benefit from lower maintenance costs, extended life and reduced vibration, without affecting cabin load or needing to drill into the tail skid.

Echoing the thoughts of Waypoint Leasing regarding diversifying into new markets, HEMS and SAR was a clear focus for Helitech International. Bell Helicopter displayed its Bell 429 aircraft that is being used by Heli-Alps for HEMS activities. Meanwhile Leonardo Helicopters showcased its AW189 for long-range, all-weather SAR and MEDEVAC missions, and Airbus Helicoptersshowed its light twin-engine H145 in HEMS configuration. Aerolite and Air Ambulance Technology were just two of the many businesses displaying air medical solutions.

It wasn’t all about HEMS and SAR, with new helicopter orders in decline, maintenance and repair was a popular subject. AIM Norway, Airborne Services, Heli-One, HeliSpeed, LORD Corporation and SATORI were just some of those presenting services to the operators in attendance. Suppliers of hydraulic systems, instruments, navigation systems and safety equipment were also present at Helitech International 2016.

One of the many visitors to the show was Konstantins Krivovs of Octopus ISR Systems, he said: “I visited the show today to search for new electrical optical products. To have such a wide range of exhibitors at one event is very convenient and I had a number of promising conversations with exhibitors.”

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