DAHER AIRCRAFT DELIVERED FIRST TBM 960 “BIRDDOG” AIRPLANES TO CONAIR IN SUPPORT OF WILDFIRE AIR ATTACK MISSIONS

News / Manufacturer



Deliveries of two new-production TBM 960s as "birddog" aircraft for Conair Group Inc.'s operations in fighting wildfires have increased the use of Daher's TBM and Kodiak aircraft families in multi-mission duties. Following a thorough analysis of 50 aircraft types, Conair chose the TBM 960. This is the first time the TBM has been used in wildfire air attack operations, which entails the airplane being continuously deployed over a fire to monitor the affected area, evaluate risks, and plan airtanker drops of water/retardant.

Among the many advantages cited by Conair in its choice of the pressurized, turboprop-powered TBM 960 are the aircraft’s superior performance, modern design standards, advanced technology, high reliability and strong support from Daher as original equipment manufacturer. First TBM 960 ordered by Conair was delivered last October from Daher Aircraft’s production facility and TBM final assembly line in Tarbes, France, followed by the second airplane this month.

Nicolas Chabbert, CEO of the Daher Aircraft division commented: “Conair can count on the full resources of our Daher Care support organization, along with the backing from our extensive multi-

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mission expertise that we've acquired through operations of the TBM and Kodiak aircraft families around the world."

As wildfire air attack missions are highly demanding, the TBM 960's designed-in safety and situational awareness benefits for Conair's operations include: Daher's digital e-copilot technology for electronic stability, under-speed protection, and an emergency descent mode; the EPECS single-lever, dual-channel digital control for the engine and propeller; the advanced doppler radar system that detects lightning and turbulence; and the aircraft's HomeSafe™ emergency autoland system.

Matt Bradley, Conair's President & CEO, stated: "We are planning for our future by selecting the TBM 960 in the modernization of our birddog fleet. Modernizing with the TBM 960 ensures our birddog aircraft aren't grounded when needed the most due to a lack of spare parts, increased maintenance, or obsolescence."

Conair is retrofitting its TBM 960s with avionics and equipment specific to wildfire operations, enabling them to provide tactical and strategic direction for aerial firefighting aircraft that operate overhead of the wildfires. During the 2025 fire season, both TBM 960s will deploy in Canada, with a government agency Air Attack Officer in the right seat and a Conair pilot in the left. The Air Attack Officer communicates with all pilots of rotary and fixed-wing aircraft involved in aerial firefighting, along with the ground crews – ensuring safe and effective operations.

Mike Benson, the Director of Business Development at Conair, said the company's legacy fleet of birddog aircraft are reaching the end of their lifespans given the demanding conditions in which they operate on a continuous basis, including turbulence, heat, smoke and fluctuating elevations.

"The new TBM 960s offer key advantages for aerial firefighting response," Benson added. "They are fast, keeping pace with large airtankers; offer superior visibility, providing crews with the ability to observe aircraft in a crowded airspace; are able to fly low and slow, showing airtankers where to place drops on a wildfire; and can be converted into multi-role platforms if desired by our government agency partners – incorporating the technologies used to map wildfires or provide search & rescue capability."

Conair's TBM 960 birddog duties will build on the TBM aircraft family's proven multi-mission applications, which include military/government transportation and liaison, along with flight test support and aerial cinematography – both of which benefit from the ability to install payloads on the aircraft's two underwing hardpoints.

The other turboprop-powered airplane in Daher's product line – the unpressurized Kodiak utility aircraft – is used extensively around the globe in multi-mission duties that range from humanitarian flights, environmental monitoring, medical evacuation and law enforcement to firefighting support, public safety and parachute operations.

Two Kodiak versions are in production at Daher Aircraft's Sandpoint, Idaho industrial facility: the cornerstone Kodiak 100 and the longer-fuselage Kodiak 900, both of which offer STOL capability from off-airport locations and backcountry strips, along with long loiter times. Kodiak 100s also have the engineered-in capability to be float-equipped for operation on land and water. Today, some 100 aircraft from the Kodiak 100/Kodiak 900 families are utilized for multi-mission duties worldwide, logging a combined total of approximately 35,000 flight hours annually in such service.

As of December 31, 2024, a total of 365 Kodiak and 1,243 TBM aircraft had been delivered to

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international owners and operators, with the global fleet accumulating nearly three million flight hours.

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