THIRD AW609 TILTROTOR PROTOTYPE RESUMES TESTING FOLLOWING FATAL CRASH

News / Manufacturer



After a six month hiatus, ground tests have resumed on the third prototype (A/C3) of the AgustaWestland AW609 tiltrotor. The aircraft recently underwent restrained ground testing with all engines and systems online after testing was suspended following a fatal air crash on October 30, 2015, which cost the lives of two test pilots.

According to Leonardo-Finmeccanica, the recent ground tests involving the third prototype follow on the heels of the restart of the testing program in April and took place at the company's facilities in Cascina Costa, Italy, where the aircraft was tied to the ground with all systems powered up and running.

Flight tests are set to resume in a few months in Philadelphia, with the long-delayed FAA certification now expected sometime in 2018 with first deliveries to begin shortly afterward. In the meantime, A/C3 will undergo icing tests, and a fourth prototype, A/C4, is currently being assembled in Philadelphia and is expected to join the fleet next year.

Starting life in 1996 as the experimental tiltrotor Bell XV-15 developed by Bell/Boeing, the AW609 tiltrotor combines the VTOL and hovering abilities of a helicopter with the payload, speed and range of a fixed-wing aircraft. It has a cruising speed of 275 kt (316 mph, 509 km/h), an operating altitude of 25,000 ft (7,620 m), and can carry crew of up to two and six to nine passengers in pressurized comfort for up to 1,000 nm (1,150 mi, 1,850 km). It's offered in passenger,

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surveillance, search and rescue, and medivac versions.

The testing program was temporarily suspended last year when the second prototype broke up in midair over northwest Italy during a high-speed test flight, killing test pilots Pietro Venanzi and Herb Moran.

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