

Heli-Expo

2007

REPORT

OEMs shift focus from new models to current ones

by Meredith Saini

At this year's Heli-Expo in Orlando, the major manufacturers racked up \$732 million in new orders—up 18 percent from the \$620 million in deals signed in Dallas last year—and they did it without having anything markedly different to offer. This increase was despite a decrease in attendance of almost 2,000 people from last year to 14,806. Many companies indicated that they are expending most of their available resources to keep up with existing demand and bulging order backlogs, with little left over for new product development.

"Feeling comfortable is the first sign [that you could] lose," Eurocopter CEO Lutz Bertling told reporters at an opening-day press breakfast. "We need to make sure that we don't overheat."

As a result, in terms of product announcements, this year's show was somewhat more sedate than last year's, where Bell Helicopter unveiled its 417 single with much fanfare. At this year's event the company announced that it had canceled the project because, according to Bell executives, the business case for it failed to germinate.

Bell's new CEO, longtime Textron executive Richard Millman, emerged briefly from the company's booth after opting out of his previously anticipated presence at Bell's pre-show press conference so he could attend a Textron board meeting elsewhere in Florida. Millman told *AIN* that he is still getting his bearings at Bell and spent most of his time at Heli-Expo greeting customers. "You have to give me a few weeks," he said, noting that his main priority in these first few months is ensuring that Bell meets its customer commitments.

Frank Robinson confirmed his plans to build the four-seat R66, his first turbine product. The company announced the news with little fanfare, and the only detail Robinson revealed was that the helicopter would be powered by Rolls-Royce's new Model 300 turboshaft, which was officially announced at the show.

The Sikorsky booth attracted some attention as company representatives lifted a wispy black veil off Sikorsky's first search-and-rescue S-92 to the sound of thunder claps and a shower of paper confetti. Though signs of the company's ongoing X-2 technol-

ogy demonstrator program were scarce, visitors to Sikorsky's booth could test-fly a cabin and cockpit mock-up of the new S-76D.

Bell/Agusta Aerospace brought its full-scale representation of the BA609 tiltrotor to Orlando, though company representatives indicated that the aircraft would make a stronger statement at the Paris Air Show this summer. Flight-testing on the 275-plus-knot hybrid continues with two test aircraft, one in Italy and one in Texas.

Manufacturers Feel Production Squeeze

Honeywell released its annual outlook on the market for turbine-powered civil helicopter purchases on the eve of the show, forecasting some 3,500 new deliveries over the next five years. Most of the nearly 1,000 flight departments that responded to the company's survey of their purchase plans said they expected to replace older helicopters in the same size, capability and price class, with only about 12 percent trading up to larger, more capable equipment.

With a \$14.5 billion backlog and sales up 50 percent last year, Eurocopter remains the market leader and one of several manufacturers hoping to profit from the projected demand for new helicopters.

"We will not let customer support suffer because we need the spares to build new helicopters," Bertling said. Turbomeca CEO Emeric d'Arcimoles echoed the sentiment, telling *AIN* that demand for loaner engines has been increasing by about 7 percent per year as customers push more hours onto their growing fleets.

Turbomeca produced 979 new helicopter engines last year and is expanding its presence in North America to support burgeoning demand from manufacturers including American Eurocopter, which has a contract with the U.S. Army to build more than 300 copies of the UH-72A light twin-engine

helicopter, a variant of the civil EC 145. A Turbomeca spokeswoman said the company planned to announce the location of its new North American plant within a few weeks of the show.

AgustaWestland CEO Giuseppe Orsi reported an order backlog of \$11.23 billion for the Italian manufacturer, with new orders valued at more than \$5 billion. Recent new business includes orders for 110 copies of the single-engine Koala A119 from 55 customers in 18 countries, plus new orders for 48 more helicopters announced at the show. Orsi said AgustaWestland is making a concerted effort to "get close to the customer" by increasing the number of its customer information centers, distributors and support facilities to 200 by the end of 2009.

At this year's Heli-Expo, AgustaWestland announced an upgrade to its AW119 light single to be dubbed the AW119 Ke, for Koala enhanced. The Ke will be priced "slightly higher" and feature a 286-pound increase in max takeoff weight.

Continued on page 90

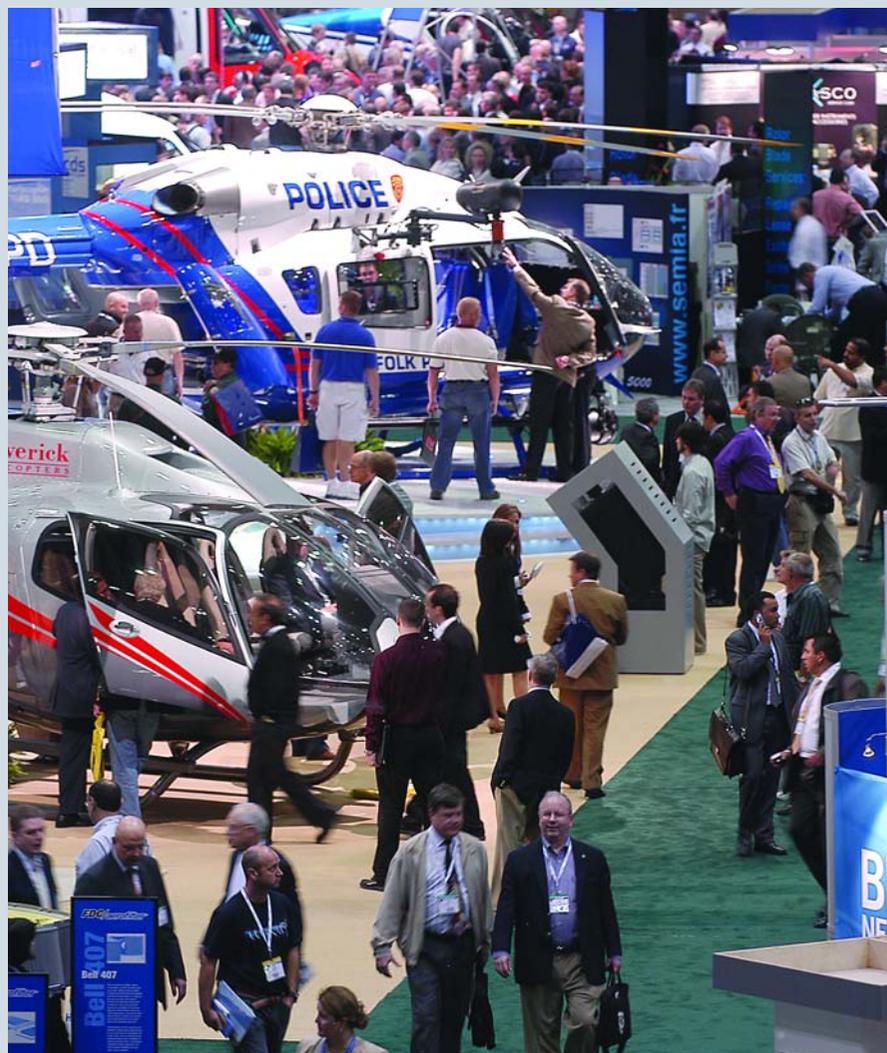
Salute to Excellence Awards

HAI's Salute to Excellence awards celebration was held in the Grand Ballroom of the Rosen Centre Hotel on March 2. The winners, listed below, were honored with a short video recognizing their achievements and contributions to the industry and society.

- **Aviation Maintenance Technician Award,** Ron Gilroy
- **Aviation Repair Specialist Award,** Richard Wolfgang
- **Igor I. Sikorsky Award for Humanitarian Service,** Crew of Helicopter ER-MHH (Alexey Ostapenko, Oleg Pazynitch, Alexander Ivlev, Barry Shepherd and John Funnell)
- **The Joe Mashman Safety Award,** Scott Baxter
- **Outstanding Certified Flight Instructor Award,** Mel Schiller
- **Agusta Community Service Award,** New York City Police Department Aviation Unit
- **Eurocopter Golden Hour Award,** Crew of HH-65C CG6553 (Lt. Brian Waring, Lt. Patrick Lineberry, AET2 David Fanelli, AST1 John Isbell)
- **Excellence in Communications Award,** Mike Reyno and Linda Reyno
- **Helicopter Maintenance Award,** Glen Cornett
- **MD Helicopters Law Enforcement Award,** Monica McIntyre
- **Lawrence D. Bell Memorial Award,** Wanda Lee Rogers
- **Robert E. Trimble Memorial Award,** Kenneth Eichner, posthumous
- **Pilot of the Year Award,** Dale Weir



Sikorsky took the wraps off a search-and-rescue S-92.



PHOTOS: ROGER BAIN

Heli-Expo

► Continued from page 88

The three new orders Sikorsky announced at the show might pale in comparison to those its European counterparts publicized at the show, but the Stratford, Conn., manufacturer remains confident about its prospects for the future, especially in the military sector. At last year's show, Sikorsky CEO Jeffrey Pino said he was optimistic that by Heli-Expo 2007, Sikorsky would be the helicopter manufacturer with the highest total revenue. While that goal proved elusive, Sikorsky did claim that it logged a record year last year, with \$3.2 billion in revenue—up from \$2.8 billion the previous year.

Pino said the company's strategy for maintaining an on-time production schedule includes shifting completions work away from the main plant in Stratford. Keystone Helicopter Holdings, which Sikorsky acquired in December 2005, now handles all S-76 completions at its West Chester, Pa. facility.

"Our supply chain revolves around deciding what's important to us, which is final assembly, flight dynamics and flight test, and moving the rest of that stream out of here," Pino told *AIN* in a pre-show interview. "If the aviation



JIM LUPTON

Showgoers who stopped by Sikorsky's display could check out the cockpit of the company's S-76D.

industry decides to change its supply chain, it takes six months to a year. It's a tremendous up-cycle for the whole industry?"

In recent years, MD Helicopters has been mentioned frequently in discussions about supply chain problems. "MD can sell—and has sold—all that we can build," company CEO Lynn Tilton told *AIN*. "It is the procurement of parts in sufficient magnitude and at fair prices that has been a continued challenge."

At a press conference held during the show, Tilton said MD plans to deliver 48 helicopters this year even as it continues to struggle with supply-chain bottlenecks. "It's not a one-year

fix. It's not a two-year fix. This is a five-year turnaround."

New Technology on Display

Although the focus of this year's Heli-Expo clearly was on sales and production of existing helicopter models, signs of new technology were visible on the show floor.

One of the more prominent of these was Honeywell's integrated primary flight display (IPFD) featuring a synthetic vision system (SVS) designed specifically for helicopters. Phoenix-based Honeywell introduced

Heli-Expo 2007 Highlights Helicopter Cabin Interiors

At Heli-Expo 2007 in Orlando last month, cabin completion and refurbishment was a major topic, from a designer interior to expansion to meet growing demand—good news in many cases for independent shops.

Sikorsky Aircraft president Jeff Pino noted that growth has put such a strain on the main facilities in Stratford, Conn., "you can't find a parking space any more." The company is no longer doing unique interior configurations in Stratford, he said, but is instead sending the finished airframes elsewhere for completion.

AgustaWestland and **Versace**, one of the world's leading fashion houses, have announced a collaboration to create a range of haute couture executive cabins. Versace will design them and AgustaWestland will build them, said an AgustaWestland spokesman, noting, "The Versace style uses significant elements of the great classic tradition...mixed with a modern approach to elegance and comfort."

The Coulson Group of British Columbia, which probably has as much experience with the Sikorsky S-61 as any company outside Sikorsky Aircraft, is expanding its fleet to include a combination offshore and executive transport. Work on the first "ultra-deluxe" S-61 will begin this year. The prototype calls for a walk-around cabin, on-board auxiliary power unit and a lavatory. Coulson CEO Wayne Coulson believes an S-61 that costs between \$5 and \$6 million, with a capacity of 12 to 14 passengers, would be an attractive alternative to the smaller AgustaWestland AW139 and Sikorsky S-76 and S-92. The executive cabin could be converted to offshore shuttle configuration in

a day. The first ship is due to be finished this fall, and Coulson plans to show it at next year's Heli-Expo.

Metro Aviation of Shreveport, La., will be moving into a new, 160,000-sq-ft facility that will allow for an expansion of its helicopter cabin completion and refurbishment core business. Included in the new digs are three exterior paint booths, one of which will accommodate transport-category helicopters. The facility will permit the simultaneous prep and painting of two airframes.



The distinctive Versace touch is featured in an AgustaWestland 109 Grand cabin mockup at Heli-Expo.



Coulson developed a quick-change executive and shuttle interior for the Sikorsky S-61.

Helitowcart of Levis, Quebec, was promoting its new HeliCushion kit for the "instant refurbishing" of Eurocopter AS 350 and AS 355 seats. The "ready-to-go" kit consists of molded foam buildup and cover and is designed to slide into place in seconds. A set of six seats is priced at \$2,743.

Emteq introduced a new night-vision imaging system upgrade with light-emitting diode (LED) technology. The NVIS unit operates on 28 VDC to draw 80 percent less current than incandescent lighting and is applicable to dual-mode dome lights, dual-mode wash lighting and flexible strip lighting. The New Berlin, Wis. company is expanding and recently reached an agreement for the purchase of airborne lighting systems specialist Flight Components, of Bachenbulach, Switzerland.

Keystone Helicopters of Coatesville, Pa., has signed an agreement to provide completion and maintenance service for Seacore's aviation division. Keystone has also announced delivery of its first S-76++ outfitted with the new Silencer interior. The package weighs about 100 pounds less than the standard interior and offers sound levels of 81 dB.

—K.J.H.

its fixed-wing IPFD at the Farnborough Air Show last July, touting it as the first "forward fit" (as opposed to retrofit) high-end SVS product on the market.

Product manager Sergio Cecutta told **AIN** that while night vision goggles (NVGs) and infrared enhanced vision systems (EVS) are excellent for providing increased situational awareness, he said these sensor-only systems do not deliver the precise visual cues required by helicopter pilots flying down low in conditions of marginal visibility.

The main difference between Honeywell's helicopter IPFD and its fixed-wing application is the display database. The helicopter IPFD is designed to render the real-world combinations of pitch and motion that are not possible in fixed-wing aircraft, such as a negative pitch on take-off and climb.

Also, the helicopter terrain database features contour lines that are much

ponents must meet strict guidelines for illumination while NVGs are being worn.

The FAA made a hard sell at Heli-Expo to offshore oil operators that will soon have the opportunity to receive unprecedented traffic and weather information in the cockpit via ADS-B (automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast) technology—if they equip their helicopters with special equipment that can receive and display the information.

"If you put this equipment on your airplane, you will get priority service—like an HOV lane," said Rick Castaldo, an FAA engineer working closely with FAA ADS-B program manager Vincent Capezuto. "Aside from the air traffic benefit, this will help you manage your resources," he added.

Castaldo assured those attending the Heli-Expo briefing that ADS-B will continue to be funded through its maturity. The FAA's budget for the program

information, using radio relays from other aircraft or cellphones.

A Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) is expected to be published in September, requiring all aircraft to use ADS-B by 2020 as part of the FAA's Next Generation Air Transportation System. A final rule on the NPRM is expected in 2009. Castaldo said the FAA expects about 25 percent of the nation's aircraft will be ADS-B ready by 2014.

HAI Professional Education Series

According to HAI, more than 500 people participated in this year's Professional Education Series, which began on February 24.

The courses were divided into four categories: safety, management, pilot training and maintenance. Each participant received a free one-day pass to Heli-Expo. Two more education courses—"Defining Direct Operating Costs" and "Advanced Helicopter Operator Management"—took place after the event.

The association is also bringing its education program to a number of convenient locations with its new "On the Road" series, for those who could not make it to Orlando. For more information about the program, contact HAI at (703) 683-4646 or send an e-mail to education@rotor.com.

Next year's Heli-Expo event will be held from February 24 to 26 in Houston. □



closer together, with a resolution of six arc-seconds compared with 24 for the fixed-wing version. The database will contain 108,000 obstacles 100 feet and higher, including Gulf of Mexico and North Sea oil platforms. The developmental system now being flown in a Honeywell AStar also accepts pilot inputs of obstacles and waypoint designations using GPS lat-long coordinates. (To watch a video of the system in action, visit www.aintv.com.)

AIN learned that Sikorsky and avionics integrator Thales are discussing plans to incorporate SVS into the Thales TopDeck avionics suite in Sikorsky's new S-76D. Sikorsky named Thales as its avionics provider for the S-76D in 2005. Certification of the aircraft is expected next year, but it remains unclear whether an SVS solution will be available by then.

FLIR Systems of Portland, Ore., introduced a new low-cost thermal camera system called the EVS3. Environmentally sealed and priced at less than \$15,000, the EVS3 uses a high-resolution vanadium oxide infrared detector to produce real-time thermal enhanced-vision imagery that can be displayed on multifunction or secondary aircraft displays that have auxiliary inputs. The product should be available this summer.

In response to the increasing use of NVGs, Sky Connect of Takoma Park, Md., introduced its new NVG lighting-compatible satcom dialers. The units are designed for use in cockpits where com-

Bell/Agusta showcased its BA609, which will also appear at the Paris Air Show. Below, the R-R Model 300 turboshaft, which will power the Robinson R66.



through 2008 is \$80 million, with private industry expected to contribute at least that much to the joint effort by providing the physical locations where the agency will install its equipment.

The FAA plans to award a contract in July for the deployment of the necessary infrastructure, which includes up to 16 communications stations and 26 automated weather sensors that will be located on offshore oil and gas platforms.

According to HAI, there are 650 helicopters operating in the Gulf supporting more than 5,000 offshore oil and gas platforms. These operators have historically been left to their own devices to keep track of aircraft and obtain weather