

# Heli-Expo 2012

## Show Highlights

### Oil-and-gas helicopters take center stage in Dallas

by R. Randall Padfield

America may run on Dunkin', but the world runs on oil.

So does the helicopter industry. This was particularly evident at Heli-Expo 2012 (February 11 to 14), held rather appropriately in Dallas, deep in the heart of the U.S. petroleum market.

The annual event's biggest news also signaled the importance of petroleum to rotorcraft. In helicopters announced, exhibited, ordered and financed the oil-and-gas market reigned supreme.

If Heli-Expo were the Academy Awards, Bell Helicopter would have taken the Oscar for glitziest product "reveal," as the Fort Worth-based OEM called it. The Sunday morning event was so big, so high tech, so glam, so hyped, so expected, so standing-room-only that Bell decided to do an unplanned instant replay of it the next day for attendees who had missed it the day before, or wanted to see it again. And this was after Bell had held a big customer party on Saturday at the Dallas Cowboys Stadium

in nearby Arlington. Without a doubt, Bell chose to capitalize on its home-field advantage.

#### Bell Reveals the Relentless

The star of Bell's reveal was a full-size mockup of its **Model 525 Relentless**, an 18-passenger, 18,000-pound-plus "super-medium" twin aimed squarely at (drum roll, please) the oil-and-gas market. The impressive large, sleek helicopter, painted in bright yellow with black highlights and the logo of PHI on the side, clearly spoke of its

launch customer and its market. Bell CEO John Garrison said the company used significant customer input in the design of the 525, and PHI participated heavily in this endeavor.

The Relentless will be powered by two General Electric CT7-2F1 turboshaft engines rated at 1,800 shp each. These will drive an all-composite, five-blade main rotor and four-blade tail rotor. The helicopter will incorporate a triple-redundant fly-by-wire flight control system with a BAE flight computer.

Its cockpit will feature a **Garmin G5000H integrated avionics suite** with four large touch-screen-controlled displays and Telligent voice-command capability. These elements are central to Bell's ARC (awareness, reactive and control) cockpit concept.



Lease Corporation International executive chairman Crispin Maunder, left, and CEO Michael Platt signed a major sales deal with AgustaWestland at Heli-Expo. In a deal worth \$398 million, LCI will take an undisclosed number of AW139s, 169s and 189s.

Performance expectations for the 525 include a range of more than 400 nm, a cruise speed of close to 150 knots and a ceiling of 20,000 feet.

Bell aims to fly the 525 in 2013 or 2014 and achieve certification in 2015. Its unit price is

expected to fall between those of the AgustaWestland AW189 and Eurocopter EC225. However, although Bell has announced PHI as the launch customer, it is not yet taking orders for the 525.

#### AW Logs Big Order with Finance Company

While none of the other OEMs tried to match the pizzazz of the Relentless's double release, several of the other big guns had plenty of ammo to shoot into the Texas sky.

AgustaWestland scored big on Saturday by announcing a purchase agreement valued at \$398 million for an undisclosed number of AW139s, AW169s and AW189s to Lease Corporation International (LCI) of Dublin. Deliveries of the AW139s to LCI are planned to begin next year, followed by the AW189s in 2014 (after its certification in 2013) and the AW169s after its certification in 2014.

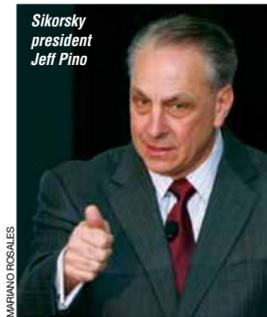
Michael Platt, CEO of LCI, told AIN, "There will be other orders from other OEMs and we plan to offer a buy-and-lease-back program for current owners and operators." He said he foresees an explosion of helicopter sales in Asia, where limited infrastructure holds back greater growth in the fixed-wing market.

Meanwhile, AgustaWestland emphasized the commonality it is building into its helicopter line, with respect to systems, training and product support. A stroll among its full-size mockups on display at Heli-Expo definitely supported this concept. The company is banking on operators who need a fleet with diverse capabilities recognizing the benefits of brand loyalty.

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Eurocopter unveiled its updated EC130, the EC130T2, and announced orders for 105 of the aircraft.



Sikorsky president Jeff Pino

Heli-Expo. "The overall success of Eurocopter at Heli-Expo 2012 demonstrates the global market's continuing recovery," Bertling said. "The high level of orders confirms the value of Eurocopter's strategy to invest, innovate and improve to optimize customer value."

#### Milestone Aviation Scores with Eurocopter and Sikorsky

Big orders from financing companies are commonplace in the airline business and are now becoming more common in the helicopter industry, particularly among (you guessed it) oil-and-gas operators.

One reason for this, as explained to AIN by Richard Santulli, CEO of Milestone Aviation Group (and founder and former CEO of NetJets), is the contract-bidding process for helicopter services the oil companies use. Operators must include specific serial numbers of the helicopters that they plan to use to fulfill the contract, apparently so the oil companies can be confident that the operator is offering aircraft it actually has available.

At Heli-Expo, Milestone signed for 16 EC225s and accepted orders from Noordzee Helicopters Vlaanderen's for 10 EC175s. In addition, UTair confirmed its order—signed last year—for 15 EC175s from Milestone. Other orders were placed for EC135s and EC145s.

Milestone also announced it had completed operating leases for two Eurocopter EC225s with Bristow Helicopters in December 2011, deliverable in the middle of this year, and anticipates closing the leases for three new Sikorsky S-92 helicopters later this quarter. All five of these Bristow helicopters are expected to operate in the North Sea. Their total value is between \$125 and \$135 million.

In another deal, Milestone and

Turbomeca announced they are developing new engine support service for Milestone's lease customers, to be called the Milestone Support by the Hour program.

#### Biggest Sikorsky S-92 Order Ever

The final highlight in the oil-and-gas arena came from offshore operator Bond Aviation Group, with a blockbusting order for 16 Sikorsky S-92s. According to Sikorsky, this is the biggest single order for S-92s yet. By comparison, the OEM reported it sold a total of 19 S-92s last year.

The sale announced at Heli-Expo is even sweeter for Sikorsky because Bond is a new customer. The operator is a subsidiary of World Aviation Group, which flies more than 300 helicopters worldwide.

Jeff Pino, Sikorsky CEO, said that the offshore oil and gas industry segments are currently driving the large-helicopter market. And because the average age of the current offshore fleet is about 30 years, he expects to see even more orders in the future. Sikorsky sold \$7.4 billion in helicopters last year.

#### It's Not All Oil and Gas

While oil and gas rule the helicopter industry in sales and revenue today and will likely rule for many years to come, other segments of the industry were also well represented at Heli-Expo.

Air medical continues to be strong, especially among the companies offering cabin layouts for this segment of the industry. Law enforcement attracts a lot of attention, as do air touring, search-and-rescue, construction, training and a plethora of other applications in niche markets.

And there are markets waiting to be discovered. What Robert Belle, managing director of AgustaWestland Tilt Rotor, said about the AW609 tiltrotor (see



PHOTOS: BILL BERENSTEIN

After not flying in front of the public for more than three years, the AW609 flew in front of journalists in Dallas.

#### Civil Tiltrotor and K-Max Aerial Truck Back in the Saddle?

AgustaWestland probably made the most unexpected announcement of Heli-Expo 2012 in the most low-key of ways, while Kaman made no announcement at all. But a renewal, or even rebirth, of the AW609 and K-Max could be in the works.

On the Saturday before the show, AgustaWestland invited journalists to visit the **AgustaWestland Tilt Rotor facility in Arlington** (not far from Dallas) to see where some work and assembly is being done on the **renamed AW609 tiltrotor**. This program has a long history, the latest chapter of which involved AgustaWestland taking full control of the beleaguered BA609 in November last year, after being in partnership with Bell Helicopter.

AIN's writer and photographer returned from the event with surprising photos of the AW609 flying (surprising because the helicopter had not flown in front of the public since the 2008 Farnborough Air Show) and a report that AgustaWestland plans to begin certification flights of the rotorcraft next year. The company's goal for the AW609 is simultaneous FAA and EASA certification in the first half of 2016 and deliveries that same year.

Other details (such as the price) are still sketchy, but Robert Belle, AgustaWestland Tilt Rotor managing director, said the company holds orders for almost 70 aircraft from 40 customers. Applications include oil and gas, search-and-rescue and maritime patrol. "I'm sure there are many applications out there we haven't conceived of yet, in interesting ways that are yet to be invented," he said.

#### Pilotless K-Max Gaining Converts

Sal Bordonaro, president of Kaman Helicopters, told AIN at Heli-Expo that Kaman is awaiting a potential order from the U.S. Marines for more K-Max "unmanned aerial vehicles," following experience with two of the aircraft which entered service in Afghanistan on December 17. Since then, the two K-Max aircraft have logged some 100 hours and carried nearly 200,000 pounds of cargo.

If the order comes through, Kaman will restart the K-Max production line, and is already preparing to do so, Bordonaro said. The line was shut down in 2003 after the 38th K-Max was built. Twelve have been written off following accidents.

—R.R.P.



HAI president Matt Zuccaro with AINtv

#### Heli-Expo 2012 Sees Record Attendance

Matt Zuccaro, Helicopter Association International president, expected a record number of visitors to Heli-Expo 2012, HAI's 64th annual convention and exposition, and he got them: 19,239. The previous record was 17,995 set in 2008.

More than 650 companies exhibited, up from 625 in 2011, and 60 helicopters were shown on the show floor.

In addition, the Heli-Expo job fair set a record with 1,021 attendees. According to HAI the event usually averages around 600. —R.R.P.



Bell brought plenty of glitz and glamour to Dallas, with the unveiling of its 525 Relentless attracting so much attention it staged a second show.

BILL BERENSTEIN

#### Find More News from Heli-Expo 2012 on AINonline

Many of the 650 exhibitors at Heli-Expo 2012 had stories to tell. AIN's sister publication **HAI Convention News** covered news from more than 200 companies in its three daily issues at Heli-Expo.

For more news from Heli-Expo 2012, including podcasts, image galleries and AINtv videos, go to [www.ainonline.com](http://www.ainonline.com) and select "HAI Convention News" in the "Publications" tab on the homepage. There you will also find digital copies of the **HAI Convention News** issues, which you can download free from Issuu.

