What have you done for me lately?

Designing and manufacturing an aircraft is only the start of a business, but it’s when those aircraft enter service that the real work begins. Supporting them for the many decades they will fly, original equipment manufacturers (OEMS) long ago realized the importance of product support and they spend vast amounts of time and money, not only to make sure their in-service products stay safe but also to make sure their customers stay happy. Owners and operators invariably express amazement at the price of an aircraft, but when considering the enormous efforts that OEMs must apply to supporting their products, it’s not surprising to learn that just one turbine engine, for example, costs half a million dollars.

That is why the AIN Product Support Survey results for 2014 were so interesting. A total of 174 aircraft models were receiving ratings, with 805 respondents rating an average of 10.7 aircraft. Of the survey respondents, 50% rate aircraft operators and 50% OEMs. Respondents were also asked to provide additional comments, and 20% of the respondents provided additional comments.

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Dassault Aircraft Services added a new satellite service station in Van Nuys, Calif. A new factory-owned satellite service station at Moscow Vnukovo Airport offers line maintenance and AOG services for all Falcons.

Falcon Classics was unveiled last year to support Falcon 10s, 20s and 50s. The new program is designed to help improve availability while lowering costs for operators through partnerships with “selected vendors and suppliers.”

Dassault Falcon released a new iOS and Android customer service app that provides online access to AOG hotlines, field service contacts, service centers and a search feature for the nearest support contact and facility.

Dassault Falcon continues its efforts to attack the high cost of parts, and its Spares Special Programs have lowered prices on many parts. One such effort during the past two years was to cut the prices of parts costing $3,000 or less, a category that generates two-thirds of parts price complaints from operators and comprises three-quarters of Falcon inventory.

**Eclipse Aerospace**

This year marked the return of Eclipse Aerospace to the ranks of new-jet manufacturers, with delivery of the first Eclipse 550 on March 12. To support the 550, Eclipse is offering a guaranteed parts cost program. Current Eclipse 500 owners can upgrade to the 550’s Avionics Suite (IFMS, made by Innovative Solutions & Support) avions suite, which offers high-resolution displays and a dual-redundant FMS.

Eclipse has also doubled the airframe life to 20,000 hours/cycles with no calendar limit (500 and 550), added anti-skid brakes (retrofittable to 500s with the IFMS avionics), an autothrottle system, a new standby display, new glass-faced windshields, improved landing-gear actuators and improved Fadee software.

To expand its service capabilities, Eclipse added a new Gold-level authorized service center in San Diego, Crowrnair Aviation at Montgomery Field.

According to Eclipse, “Same-day shipping of replacement parts continues to exceed 90 percent. Both Eclipse 500 and 550 owners continue to benefit from longer warranties derived from Eclipse 550 production.”

**Combined Overall Ratings of Newer and Older Aircraft**

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<tr>
<th>Overall Average</th>
<th>Overall Average</th>
<th>Rating Change from 2013 to 2014</th>
<th>Factory Daimler Service Centers</th>
<th>Authorized Service Centers</th>
<th>Parts Availability</th>
<th>Cost of Parts</th>
<th>AOG Response</th>
<th>Warranty Fulfillment</th>
<th>Technical Manuals</th>
<th>Technical Reps</th>
<th>Maintenance Tracking Programs</th>
<th>Overall Aircraft Reliability</th>
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N/A: Insufficient responses. Listed in order of 2014 overall average (ties are listed alphabetically).

Ratings of Newer and Older Aircraft are based on rotocraft of all ages. Bold indicates highest number in each category.

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Embraer

Embraer inaugurated its newest factory-owned service center in Sorocaba, Brazil, in March. Able to fit up to 45 aircraft for storage and maintenance, the $25 million facility is five times larger than Embraer’s headquarters service facility in São José dos Campos. Embraer currently has 68 service centers worldwide (a combination of factory-owned and authorized facilities), and many are preparing for the imminent entry into service of the Legacy 500 and next year, the 450.

In the U.S. Embraer opened a factory-owned service center at Teterboro Airport. The Asia service network grew with the addition of an authorized service center in Jakarta. Parts have been consolidated at Embraer’s regional distribution center in Singapore, and the company expanded its Australia and India parts depots. At the Le Bourget service center in Paris, Embraer has added a mobile response unit, airworthiness management service and line maintenance for the Lineage 1000. Falcon Aviation Services, an Embraer authorized service center, opened its new 100,000-sq-ft facility at Al Bateen Executive Airport in Abu Dhabi late last year.

Last September, Embraer moved the customer support team from its Fort Lauderdale, Fla., service center to the Melbourne, Fla., production facility and engineering center. The Melbourne move includes the customer support management team, warranty, Embraer Executive Care sales and administration, field support, material services and finance. The service center itself will continue to be located in Fort Lauderdale.

Last year Embraer held 10 global conferences and nine mini conferences as part of its Embraer Executive Operators Conference series. More than 400 customers and operators participated, along with customer support and service center teams and suppliers. Embraer’s Customer Support Contact Center celebrated its fifth anniversary this year, and the company is building a new facility where technical teams will be better integrated and offer more comprehensive around-the-clock support, according to Embraer.

Embraer’s Customer Support and Service guide has been upgraded and is available in iOS or Android versions. A new feature is the “request support” function, which allows customers to make a support request to the Embraer Contact Center, and it also saves the customer identification in the app for future requests.

Gulfstream

Gulfstream’s product support organization added about 300 new employees during the past year. In Canada, Gulfstream granted its first company authorization for warranty maintenance in Canada, to Skyservice. Gulfstream’s factory-owned service center added wheel and brake capabilities and landing-gear component repairs in Appleton, Wis.; received CAAC approval for 1A through 6A inspections on the G280, G450 and G550 in Beijing; added a battery shop and a Spanish-speaking service center coordinator in Dallas; expanded the carpet and wood shops and added a tire shop in Long Beach, Calif.; and installed a G280 graphical flight simulator at the In-Flight Support Center in Savannah, Ga., to aid troubleshooting by allowing technicians to mimic in-flight circumstances. The Savannah center also received six monitors that show the status of the Gulfstream fleet worldwide, providing “a real-time visual overview of any AOGs.”

New Gulfstream facilities include a parts/materials distribution center in Van Nuys, Calif., which will be stocked with $15 million worth of inventory by year-end. Gulfstream opened an Asia Customer Support Contact Center in Hong Kong, providing over-the-counter parts sales and warranty and technical operations support. The parts warehouse in Hong Kong was also expanded.

The Computerized Maintenance Program (CMPnet) was renamed MyCMP and redesignated to help customers navigate the website and enjoy greater functionality. Gulfstream’s iOS app, introduced in August last year, enables direct access to product support resources, including Gulfstream technical operations, factory-owned and independent service centers, warranty facilities, field service representatives, parts sales and other product support contacts. The Field and Airborne Support Teams (Fast), which include mobile support and Gulfstream’s G150 for quick problem resolution, added five technicians in Europe, bringing the total to 11 for handling issues in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. A G150 flew to Brazil to support operators during the FIFA World Cup. Gulfstream outfitted a 74-foot tractor-trailer equipped with tools, parts and technicians to support operators at events throughout the U.S. Three other Fast vehicles were added during the past year, in Houston and the New York and Los Angeles metropolitan areas.

Mitsubishi

There are 285 Mitsubishi MU-2 turboprops still flying, with approximately 250 of those in North America, and Japanese manufacturer Mitsubishi Heavy Industries America (MHI) continues to provide strong support for the high-performance twin turboprop, the last of which rolled off the assembly line in 1986.

Service for the fleet is available from factory-owned and independent service centers, but a key part of the support network is Turbine Aircraft Services, based in Dallas, which is under contract to MHI to manage MU-2 support activities. This includes the biannual MU-2 Pilot’s Review of Proiciency (Prop) seminar series, four of which were held this year, as well as alternating-year safety meetings. These events are free and often attract not only long-time MU-2 pilots but also people who are considering buying an MU-2.

“We had one of the most successful Prop series of all time in 2014,” said Pat Cannon, president of Turbine Aircraft services. He was encouraged to see a new crop of attendees, pilots who are new MU-2 owners and care deeply about safety. “They’re all over the technology, training and doing things as they should be done,” he said. These buyers are passionate about upgrading their MU-2s, and many are installing Garmin G600 and GTN650/750 avionics. They are also likely buyers of the soon-to-be-certified Alpha Systems angle-of-attack warning system.

Turbine Aircraft and MHI are also looking into replacing Plexiglas cast windshields with stretched acrylic units, which will last longer. Another project is replacement of deteriorating faceplates on control wheels, all of which are decades old. “We’ve undertaken a program to use 3-D printing to build new facing plates,” Cannon said.

Ultimately, an STC to replace MU-2 control wheels with Beechjet yokes might make sense, and this would also include the Beechjet’s four-way trim switch. “I have reopened my discussions with the wheel manufacturer and with the person who owns the four-way trim switch mod, and we’re probably going to do it if it’s practi- cal,” he said. An STC for new hoses to replace expensive Japanese-made flexible hoses is in the final process, and this will help cut costs for operators. For any parts that are in short supply, Turbine Aircraft and MHI figure out how to source enough parts for the next 10 to 15 years, according to Cannon. “[MHI] is still attuned to making an effort to service this airplane long into the future.”

Keeping the fleet flying is not just about supplying parts, however; it has more to do with creating a robust safety culture throughout the MU-2 community. Before 2009, when the Special FAR requiring mandatory MU-2 pilot training took effect, there was a lot of pressure on the FAA from politicians who wanted something done about the MU-2’s safety record. The agency asked MHI to survey MU-2 owners about what was wrong with the MU-2, and 175 people responded, indicating that there was no consistent or mandatory training program. The result was that when the SFAR was enacted, “there was Continued on page 26
very little pushback,” Cannon said. “The majority of operators applauded the FAA.” Training to meet the SFAR requirements began before the 2009 implementation, because compliant training was grandfathered. The result of the SFAR-mandated initial, recurrent and requalification training is that the number of MU-2 accidents has dropped significantly, with just two fatal accidents since the SFAR took effect, “and neither one should have happened,” he said.

“The theme of the next series of Prop seminars is going to surround the idea of ‘Don’t just have a safety culture—live the safety culture,’” Cannon concluded. “That’s where we want to take this.”

Pilatus Aircraft

The Pilatus PC-12 single-engine turboprop fleet numbers 1,250, with 4.5 million flight hours in its logbooks. The latest model, the PC-12/47E (NG), has already passed half a million hours by 450 aircraft.

Product support improvements for the fleet introduced during the past year include a new Pilatus customer service mobile app for both iOS and Android devices. The app provides instant access to the nearest service center and Pilatus customer support contacts, documentation status lists and access to YouTube and Vimeo channels for PC-12 videos, including Honeywell Training TV videos. PC-12 training, promotional and customer testimonial videos are available on the Pilatus website.

Pilatus conducted 11 M&O seminars and regional operator conferences during the past year on five continents. The technical publications order process was streamlined, according to Pilatus, “by offering multi-year and multi-product bundles.”

Air Alliance in Germany was appointed a PC-12 service center last year, and Aeroservicio of Chile and Avercraft Engineering of New Zealand were appointed satellite service centers.

The 2014 PC-12 NG has new features that will reduce operating costs, such as an electric landing gear, which shaves 13 pounds off the empty weight, and all-LED external lighting. The Connected Flight Deck, developed in partnership with Aspen Avionics, Honeywell and Jeppesen, has been ordered by more than 70 percent of PC-12 NG buyers. Features include four iPad apps that interface with the Aspen CG100P Connected Gateway installed in the PC-12. The apps offer easy wireless database updates, uploading of off-aircraft flight planning into the FMS, maintenance and diagnostic recording and moving maps for passengers.

Textron Aviation (Beechcraft and Cessna)

Following Textron’s purchase of Beechcraft earlier this year, the company has begun merging product support efforts for its Beechcraft and Cessna brands, and Brad Thress was appointed senior vice president of customer service. There are now 21 factory-owned service facilities worldwide for Beechcraft and Cessna support and some 40 mobile service units in North America and Europe. These units have made 12,000 visits since they were launched.

All of the Textron Aviation facilities are transitioning to offering maintenance services for Citations, Hawkers and King Airs, with mechanics undergoing cross training and EASA approval to work on multiple types. Before Beechcraft’s acquisition by Textron, most Hawker and Beechcraft maintenance in Europe was done by authorized third parties, but Textron now offers the option of factory-provided maintenance for those aircraft.

The Textron service network is also in the midst of consolidating two separate networks of parts distribution and field service teams.

In Europe, Textron Aviation’s service centers have received EASA continuing airworthiness management organization (CamO) approval in Paris; Doncaster, UK; and Düsseldorf, Germany. This allows these centers to issue and extend airworthiness review certificates to EASA-registered aircraft.

In Europe, the company opened three new line support stations for Beechcraft and Cessna aircraft, at London Luton Airport, Cannes Mandelieu Airport and in Geneva. Services include repairs, inspections and AOG support.

For operators of Citation CJ1s, Cessna introduced the CJ1+ Alpine edition, which includes an upgrade to the Garmin G3000 avionics suite, automatic pressurization and a new environmental control system, new diagnostic systems, ADS-B out capability and upgraded cabin features.

Twin Commander Aircraft

Owners and operators of Twin Commander turboprops (and even the piston-powered models) enjoy continued support from Twin Commander Aircraft, and there are still about 700 of the various turboprop versions flying. There are 23 authorized service centers.

The big trend for Twin Commander owners has been avionics upgrades, and the STC for the Garmin G950 suite is a bestseller, according to Twin Commander’s Mark Matheson. “They’re selling them as fast as they can build them,” he said. The G950 is basically a G1000 without a Garmin autopilot, and it works with the S-Tec 2100 autopilot that many owners have already installed.

Twin Commander owners were faced with an expensive FAA airworthiness directive involving cracks in the aft pressure bulkhead (covered by Service Bulletin 241). Twin Commander Aircraft was able to lower the cost of compliance a bit by obtaining FAA approval for a staged approach to conducting the expensive repair. “The majority of the fleet has complied,” Mathe son said. “This was an effort by Twin Commander to be proactive and keep them flying.”

To help keep the fleet healthy, Twin Commander launched its own maintenance training program because such training isn’t available from SimCom, the official flight training provider. Four training events will be held this year.

Other improvements include an updated fuel tank kit (CK 189), a kit for installation of high-intensity-discharge landing/ recognition lights (CK 182L) and LED lights for the cabin (CK 190). The cost of replacement electrically heated windshields is an issue, and Twin Commander is offering a $5,500 rebate for each side.

Each year, the company holds a Twin Commander University event, and nearly 80 owners attended this year’s event in April.

ROTORCRAFT

AgustaWestland

Customer support and training accounts for 40 percent of AgustaWestland’s revenue. The helicopter manufacturer has revamped its approach to support maintenance by taking advantage of common components, cockpit equipment, maintenance equipment and tools.

For fleet operators that fly at least two of the manufacturer’s three production models, AgustaWestland says it has been able to improve support and efficiency, reduce life-cycle costs and improve mission effectiveness significantly.

Support for the new AW189 is enhanced by a ground maintenance simulator, advanced health and usage monitoring system and virtual maintenance training. This approach is also being applied to the in-development AW169.

AgustaWestland has developed a new progressive maintenance program for the AW139 that will “maximize availability.” The AW139’s main-gear-box TBO has been extended to 6,000 flight hours and the tail rotor and intermediate gearboxes to 7,500 hours, a 20 percent and 50-percent increase respectively. The company’s interactive electronic technical publications for the AW139 are now available on tablets and smartphones.

A new repair and overhaul facility was added to subsidiary Agusta Aerospace Services in Zaventem, Belgium, and its AgustaWestland do
Brasil facility in São Paolo is being expanded, according to the company, “with space that could accommodate a helicopter final assembly line, training center, bonded warehouse, workshops and other supporting services, including a dedicated heliport.”

Airbus Helicopters

Under CEO Guillaume Faury, who took over last year, Airbus Helicopters is “making sweeping changes to our management methods and processes, both internally and with our suppliers. These efforts are in their early stages, but already we have seen significant improvements in some critical areas. In particular we are doing a better job of working with our suppliers. These efforts, along with our suppliers, have led to significant improvements and achieving these inventories.”

“We strongly want to get much better and we are determined to do so. In these and in many other areas our management team, led by Guillaume Faury, is pushing for greater improvements and achieving them faster.”

Bell Helicopter

Bell Helicopter Customer Support and Service (CSS) has held six M&O conferences this year and has more scheduled for the remainder. CSS also held four global safety symposiums addressing flight and maintenance safety as part of Bell’s work with the International Helicopter Safety Team.

To help lower operating costs, Bell signed an MoU to collaborate with Able Engineering on repairs for Bell components. Bell also signed an MoU with Van Horn Aviation for development of composite main rotor blades for the Bell 206.

Bell 407 operators can buy a new polycarbonate windshield from Bell’s Aeronautical Accessories division. The material provides better impact resistance than acrylic.

Bell opened a composite manufacturing, repair and overhaul facility in Broussard, La., in March. The $4.5 million facility will make and repair composite parts for current and legacy Bell helicopters.

At its Singapore factory-owned service center, Bell received Singapore Civil Aviation Authority approval for maintenance and customization of Bell 206s, 407s and 429s certified under Transport Canada regulations. The Bell Helicopter Training Academy received approval for technical training by the Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority for the 412EP/EPI (B1.3 and B2).

Sikorsky

Sikorsky says it has changed the way it interfaces with customers and early this year reorganized its business structure so customers have a single-point of access for the entire duration of their helicopter ownership, beginning with the first purchase inquiry. Sikorsky created two entities—Commercial Systems & Services and Defense Systems & Services—to provide sales, delivery and aftermarket support under this reorganization.

The S-76D entered service this year with a support program that includes “customer training, service, support and focused customer communication as well as the use of customer data for advanced fleet analytics by Sikorsky’s Fleet Management Operations Center.”

The analysts combine data from the S-76D’s health and usage monitoring system with maintenance and operational data “to proactively identify opportunities for cost and availability improvements,” according to Sikorsky.

iPad Winners

The following people were randomly selected as winners of an Apple iPad for participating in our annual Product Support Survey.

- Paul Harsnott, captain
- John Zinser, senior aircraft tech
- Chris Lacroc, director of maintenance
- James Porterfield, captain
- Earlie Martin, chief pilot

AIN readers honor those who go above & beyond

We asked AIN Product Support Survey participants to list their favorite support providers and what they like about the service they receive. Here are some of the companies and people respondents chose to recognize.

Authorized Service Centers

Associated Air Center; Boeing

Knows the aircraft very well, and we always come out of an inspection on time or early and under budget.

MAGA Aviation; Bombardier

The best one in Brazil is MAGA Aviation. Thanks to engineer Edvaldo “MacGyver” Coelho. Under his leadership, the team always finds the best way to support the customers.

Duncan Aviation; Falcon

We have used Duncan Aviation Battle Creek and Lincoln for this aircraft. They’re as knowledgeable and as good as the Dassault service center.

Constant Aviation; Embracer

We couldn’t be more happy: friendly environment, fair prices and efficient service. Very low ground time.

ExecuJet Australia; Gulfstream

ExecuJet Australia provides excellent maintenance and technical support.

West Star Aviation; Hawker

West Star—great people, great maintenance. They seem to genuinely care about doing the absolute best.

Epps Aviation; Pilatus

Epps Aviation has been fantastic in its knowledge of the airplane as well as support and response times.

Technical Representatives

Michael Blouson; Bombardier

Michael Blouson is one of the best field service representatives in the industry. We would also like to say thank you to the customer response center for doing an outstanding job and getting better every year.

Bill Sciscoe; Bombardier

Our rep Bill Sciscoe does a great job. The customer response center in Montreal is also excellent. Very knowledgeable field service representatives across the board.

Randy Davis; Textron Aviation (Cessna)

Randy Davis, our Cessna representative, is an extremely valuable resource.

Tim Noble & Hank Hilsman; Dassault

Tim Noble has the patience of a saint. He’s been on the receiving end of more than one of my phone tirades and always handled them professionally. Honorable mention to Hank Hilsman in this category as well.

Mike Valek, Gilbert Gonzalez & Bruno Macedo; Embracer

Embracer has the best people in the business. Whether we are talking to Mike Valek, Gilbert Gonzalez or the other field service representatives in the U.S. or Bruno Macedo and the dedicated team of technical representatives at the contact center in Brazil, we always receive impeccable service and support.

David Peres & Chris Ellender; Gulfstream

Always available and listening to your demands. Our acknowledgement to David Peres (Madrid) and Chris Ellender (London).

Warren Hallstrom; Textron Aviation (Hawker Beechcraft)

Warren Hallstrom has been very helpful and knowledgeable, always available.

Rick Wheldon; Mitsubishi

Rick Wheldon at Turbine Aircraft Services is excellent.

John Conrad & Chris Lemaire; AgustaWestland

John Conrad is our field service rep. (Available) any time and willing to travel any place in support of our operations. Service Engineering is very supportive in our operation and Chris Lemaire works very hard in resolving any issue we present to their department.