Garmin tops in avionics sector, Airltec leads cabin electronics
by Matt Thurber

Garmin once again has claimed the top spot for cockpit avionics manufacturers in the AVIN Avionics Product Support Survey. With an 8.3 overall average, the same rating as last year and more than half a point higher than the nearest contender, the cockpit electronics front, Airltec also retained its lead with the same rating as in the 2012 survey. It’s an 8.3 in both categories, companies that weren’t rated last year (listed in NA) received enough ratings (20 minimum) to be added to the 2013 results, including L-3 Avionics, Rockwell Collins and Lufthansa Technik. Moving up to second place this year in the cockpit avionics category are Aircell and Universal Avionics with a rating of 7.7. This is the same score that Universal recorded last year for third place, while Airltec’s score climbed this year from 7.7 to 7.8. The makers of the Garmin G5000 and Honeywell’s Bendix/King division received 7.1 and 7.0 respectively this year, down from last year’s 7.3 and 7.1.

AIVON readers stepped up their game this year and rated more cockpit electronics manufacturers, which provides a better picture of their scores for a larger set of companies. Airltec’s results remain strong enough to keep it at the front of the category and, this year, Rockwell Collins received enough ratings to qualify and took second place with 7.8. Flight Display Systems moved to third place from second last year, with a 7.4, down from 7.9, and sharing third with Rockwell Collins (which was also last year’s third). In fourth place for cabin electronics manufacturers this year is Honeywell at 7.3. Lufthansa Technik is a first-timer on the chart this year, to fill an eighth at 8.9. Magnavox dropped from last year’s 7.3 to 7.1.

In the cockpit avionics category breakdown, Garmin scored the highest rating, 8.9, for overall product reliability, and logged high scores for technical manuals, warranty, AOG, cost of parts and parts availability. Airltec logged the highest score, 8.3, for technical representatives. L-3 Avionics was rated highly at 8.1 for parts availability. Rockwell Collins scored the highest overall product reliability rating for cabin electronics manufacturers at 8.1 and 8.7 for warranty fulfillment. Overall average top-scorer Airltec was rated highest for technical representatives, technical manuals, warranty, AOG, cost of parts and parts availability. Flight Display Systems tied with Airltec at 7.2 in the cost of parts category.

Manufacturers seek to improve product support

AIVON added avionics manufacturers to provide information about what they have done to improve product support efforts during the past year, and following are summaries of that information. Not all manufacturers were able to respond in time, and some are included here even though they didn’t receive enough reader ratings to be added to the results chart, in recognition of their efforts to meet customer needs. Aircell

Aircell has opened an expanded customer service, technical support and training facility next to its existing campus in Broomfield, Colo. Training users is a top priority, according to a spokesperson, "helping people understand how to install, operate and maintain our systems." To provide that training, the new facility includes a classroom and an expanded diagnostics lab for hands-on training, which technical representatives can use to test-recreate customer problems on Aircell equipment. Aircell University has also been expanded with three times the number of onsite training sessions conducted compared to the previous year and FAA acceptance of training time to count toward Inspection Authorization renewal.

Airltec

Airltec has made "significant investments in customer service, support staff and extending service hours," according to the company. At the Airltec factory service center, loan manufacturing and parts programs tied with Aircell at 7.2 in the cost of parts category.

Honeywell

Honeywell has improved its four-hour AOG delivery to 70 from 84 percent, on-time delivery to 95 from 93 percent and reduced escapes and turnaround time by 8 percent. New store locations have been added to cover 70 year-to-date, said Honeywell. This month a new mobile applet application that gives operators and technicians quick access to the Honeywell support network.

Innovative Solutions & Support (ISS)

Flat-panel display maker ISS also makes the EFIS integrated flight deck for the Total Eclipse upgrade and the new Eclipse 550 very light jet. The company has expanded service and support by adding field engineering and technical install-ation capabilities that can help with installation issues before, during and after a modification program. They are located near high-volume international airports for quick turn to remote customer locations. ISS has added interactive software solutions to its flat-panel displays so customers can interface, identify and troubleshoot installation and operational issues for quicker problem diagnosis and resolution.

International Communications Group (ICG)

Kaman has congratulated ISS (GS5001) and AS9100 quality-control standards allowed the company’s key suppliers to take advantage of the review and evaluation process to develop a now more expansive customer outreach program.”

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2013 CATEGORY RATINGS

2013 Product Support Survey • ANN • September 2013

Cockpit Avionics Manufacturers

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Companies are listed in order of 2013 overall averages. Ties are broken alphabetically. N/A indicates not eligible with zero average rating.

Airltec

Airltec has received 90 percent customer satisfaction scores for maintenance turn-around times in its avionics main-tenance center, lean manufacturing and extending service hours,” according to the company. Airltec has also opened a new updated esport portal online to help customers with information access and add customer service support. The esport portal also adds Airltec partner ven dors to track problems.

Free CMC Electronics

Estellite CMC has focused on reducing turn-around times in its avionics maintenance and repair shops and is currently expanding the number of recognized service facilities. According to Estellite CMC, this year South American and European facili-ties are expected in the coming months. According to the company. Other efforts include adding Russian certification of its Montreal headquarters and principal manufacturing, support and repair facil-ities. Among major emphasis, according to Rockwell Collins, Montreal and Ottawa facilities are planned as well. Finally, CMC has expanded its web portal for RMA requests, technical quir-ies and access to documentation.

Garmin is expanding its product sup-port efforts internationally this year by adding field service engineers and plants to open more spare depots. The new depot is in Sao Paulo, Brazil. During the past year, Garmin has also expanded its offerings of detailed operational and maintenance documents: “We are proud of our industry-leading product support and are continually taking steps to make it even more robust,” a company spokesperson said.

Garmin’s Mont-Asia office to the Cobham team, which is also planning to hire personnel in China to support growth in Asia. Cobham is currently cross-training support staff on the combined companies’ products and is updating the technical support telephone system to facilitate regional calls to global support staff. Cobham is launching a new updated esport portal online to help customers with information access and add customer service support. The esport portal also adds Cobham partner ven dors to track problems.

Aircell

Airltec

Airltec has had a new surface-mount technology line, which it calls “a major improvement to our production line.” Airltec has brought more quality improvement processes have been implemented “to eliminate waste on the factory floor.” Airltec has brought a new printed circuit board manufacturing capability to house and now has its own surface-mount technology line, which it said “is driving significant improvements in quality.” During the past 12 months, reliability and mean time between failure (MTBF) service hours improved by 39.6 percent.

Astronautics MaxViz

Enhanced vision system (EVS) manu-facturer MaxViz acquired by Astronautics last year, is now certified on more than 15 jet, turboprop, helicopter and piston air-craft types. The popular Max-Viz 1500 EVS sensor exceeds 15,000 mean hours between failure. Next up for Max-Viz is testing of a combined vision system, which integrates EVS and synthetic vision on one display. A major “integrated display system (IDS)” is testing the Max-Viz EVS with the company said, and CVSS will eventually lead “to lower minimums for MCC landings and safer overall flight operations.”
Continued from preceding page

the company said. ICG is adding more technical support specialists, and the team has introduced customer interaction channels such as post-support surveys and more extensive use of feedback and is using statistical analysis, improved product training and interaction with customers at trade shows to address support issues. To improve 24/7 response capability, ICG said it is “exploring the use of online e-learning to facilitate on-demand training and problem resolution.”

Mid-Continent Instruments and Avionics

Mid-Continent hired a new avionics program manager who is focused on the company’s avionics programs and adding avionics capabilities and services. The company has been selected as the exclusive U.S. service center for Trig Avionics. Mid-Continent has added customer service, technical service and sales support personnel and lowered turn times on many products and services. Same-day shipping from Mid-Continent’s extensive overhaul/exchange pool is available without extra fees during normal business hours, to support AOG customers. Mid-Continent is also the manufacturer of True Blue Power backup battery systems and the SAM three-in-one backup instrument.

Rockwell Collins

Later this year Rockwell Collins will open a new customer support center, which for commercial customers will provide a single point of entry for solving any issue or question. The center will feature a large video status board and a collaborative, efficient work environment, according to the company. Customers will be able to interact with support personnel via mobile device video conferencing tools such as Apple’s FaceTime. For quick access to sales or service reps, customers will soon be able to access an iPad app with current Rockwell Collins global support and dealer information.

Safe Flight Instrument

Safe Flight recently received AS9100 quality system certification. The certification process included formalizing the customer communication review system to improve and streamline communication and to develop metrics to facilitate the continuous improvement effort. Sixty-year-old Safe Flight operates a dedicated FAA-approved repair station and offers 24-hour AOG service, maintenance and operator training materials and programs and on-site technical support, according to the company.

Sandel Avionics

Sandel says it plans to continue improving internal product support and repair processes and received AS9100 and ISO9001 quality system certification last year, “which standardized processes in all aspects of the company, including manufacturing, support and repair,” according to the company. In addition to its headquarters in Southern California, Sandel maintains an office in North Carolina to extend product support. Sandel also redesigned its website earlier this year to provide current information to end-users and avionics technicians and installers.

S-Tec

Autopilot manufacturer S-Tec has added personnel to its technical support staff and this has helped it achieve what it says is a 20-percent reduction in turn-around time. S-Tec has also recently extended its warranty period to two years for new products. Repaired products are covered for one year. According to the company, “S-Tec believes when an article leaves the repair station, it will function as good as new and is willing to stand behind that belief.”

TrueNorth Avionics

TrueNorth, which manufactures cabin communications systems, augmented its customer satisfaction program this year and maintained AS9100 revision C quality system certification. A key effort was reorganizing the operations group by fine-tuning manufacturing processes, which included setting up a software update feature in the customer portal, allowing dealers to download software updates and thus serve end-users faster. TrueNorth says its on-time delivery performance has reached 97 percent, and that its repair and maintenance programs are delivering better than standard turn-around times.

above & beyond

AIN Product Support Survey participants included comments about some of their favorite support personnel and what they like about the service provided. Following are highlights from some of the comments submitted about avionics support personnel.

Aircell

Aircell has great tech reps. They are always willing to help.

Garmin

David Ladd is terrific.

Honeywell

Michael Ruddy is a great tech rep. He came to my hangar and reprogrammed my MCS 7120 satcom. I send him downloads from my aircraft all the time and he always interprets them and gets back to me in a timely manner.

Honeywell Bendix/King

Easily the best old-school tech support department in the industry.

Rockwell Collins

The tech rep for our area is exceptional and always has time and works with us until our problem is resolved.

Rosen Aviation

The support from Rosen is very good.

Universal Avionics

Jim Dunham and all the team in Wichita have done a great job for us over the years.

Universal Avionics

Universal’s new FlightAssure extended warranty program allows customers to purchase an extended warranty with set prices so they can better budget for avionics maintenance costs and eliminate the expense and surprise of dealing with avionics problems. “With FlightAssure, customers can cover older, out-of-warranty equipment or they can extend the warranty of newer equipment,” said Andy Seaton, director of product support. “Customers want stability in operating costs. Costly repairs might not be budgeted, and this way they don’t have to worry about a surprise.”