Honeywell explains heli-growth forecasts

by James Wynbrandt

Global demand for helicopters is expected to increase over the next five years, according to the results of Honeywell's Turbine-Powered Civil Helicopter Purchase Outlook survey. Deliveries of new civilian-use helicopters will total between 4,900 and 5,600 units during the years 2013 to 2017, according to Honeywell (Booth H200), with strong demand focused in the first three years of the period and reflected in every region of the world.

This demand is 35 percent higher for this five-year period than was recorded in last year’s survey. The 5,600-unit figure represents Honeywell’s expectation that demand in 2016 to 2017 will increase as operators firm up purchase plans.

The results of this, Honeywell’s 15th such annual survey, are based on queries to more than 1,000 chief pilots and flight department managers of companies that operate a combined total of 2,400 turbine and 250 piston helicopters worldwide. The survey excludes large fleet or “mega” operators, while factoring in input from oil and gas support and EMS fleet operators.

Several factors are driving the increased demand, according to Honeywell: aging aircraft fleets, contractual requirements, changing in operational requirements, expiration warranties and regulations requiring twin engines.

The U.S. and Canada are expected to account for 27 percent of the purchases, while Europe will absorb 28 percent. Latin and South America will account for 20 percent, Asia/Oceania 19 percent and Africa/Middle East will account for 6 percent of new helicopter deliveries.

Rebound This Year

The 2013 forecast represents a rebound, after the 2012 survey found a 4 percent decrease in demand over the 2011 report. Honeywell believes this indicates that the industry “may be returning to a more expansionary environment.”

Light single-engine helicopters are the most in-demand product in this time period, exemplified by the Eurocopter EC130/AH130 series, Bell 407 and Robinson R66. Most of the purchase interest for the aircraft is in North America, although the Middle East and Africa have a noticeable surge in interest in these models. Intermediate/medium twin-engine helicopters (such as the AgustaWestland AW169, Bell 412, EC145, Socimi S-76 and light helicopters (the EC135 and AW109) each get about 25 percent of the purchases. Planned purchases of heavy multi-engine helicopters (the EC225, Helicopters Mi-171 and Ansat) actually declined slightly from 2012 levels.

Meanwhile, operators are looking to expand the use of helicopters they already own, according to the survey. Actions in Asia could have the greatest impact, with many operators planning to fly more hours and take on new anticipations for their operations. One third of operators (33 percent) in the Middle East and Africa said they will increase flight operations, while about half that number in North America (15 percent) plan to do so.

In North America, 10 percent of operators plan to increase utilization, while 7 percent of Latin America, 27 percent of European operators plan to increase utilization while only 5 percent see themselves flying less.

BELL RINGS IN CIVIL HELICOPTER OPS AT HONGQIAO

At last year’s ABACE show, potential helicopter exhibitors were told that they had to truck their aircraft to the static display because of a ban on helicopters at China’s major airports. That policy changed this year, least at Hongqiao for ABACE 2013.

“On Sunday, a Bell 407 was the first civil helicopter ever to land here in Hongqiao,” said Roger Winton, NBAA’s special counsel to the president. “It wasn’t easy to get permission, and it’s taken a long time to work through all the authorities to get permission, but we got it.”

The corporate-configured Kingwing Aviation Bell 407/GX can accommodate six passengers and features Garmin G1000H flight deck. It was brought to the show by Hong Kong-based Aerocube Aviation, which was appointed as one of Bell’s independent representatives in China, Hong Kong and Macau in 2009.