



AIRBUS HELICOPTERS POSITIVE DESPITE SLUGGISH ROTORCRAFT MARKET

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Despite the subdued market for new helicopters – particularly in the oil and gas segment – **Airbus Helicopters** remains confident that it can end the year in **positive** territory.

Aided by some hefty commitments for the 7.5t H175 – it has taken in almost 40 orders for the type this year, including the first for the search and rescue variant – the manufacturer achieved a book-to-bill ratio approaching 1 during the first half.

And, says chief executive Guillaume Faury, with commercial activity more prevalent in the final six months of the year “I am confident this will be the case moving forward”.

In the meantime, flight tests of its new H160 are continuing “even faster than expected”, he says.

Flights of the initial prototype began in mid-June and so far it has been taken to a speed of 175kt (324km/h) and an altitude of 10,000ft. “It is the fastest flight envelope opening for any of our products,” says Faury.

A second prototype will arrive by year-end, with certification targeted for 2018, and Faury says the

airframer plans to move forward “as fast as we have done so far”.

Although demand for its heavy H225 from offshore operators remains depressed, Faury says that a number of contract wins for the common military M variant will enable it to switch production accordingly.

For the longer term, early concept studies for the X6 – the eventual successor to the H225 – are under way, having been announced at the Paris air show in June.

No further detail on the design is yet available, but Faury stresses that “it is a segment where we want to demonstrate leadership for the future”.

Further portfolio refinement is also taking place, with the recent confirmation that it is ceasing production of the AS355 light twin.

And although the H160 is intended as long-term replacement for the medium twin-engined AS365 and H155 Dauphin models, selection by South Korea of the latter type as the basis for its new Light Civil Helicopter/Light Attack Helicopter programme helps to secure its future, he says.

To be developed with Korea Aerospace Industries, the LCH/LAH will mean an extension to the H155’s life. “It is not a change in our product offering. H155 will still be there for a lot of years,” he says.

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