



BRITTEN-NORMAN FLIES FIRST ISLANDER BUILT IN UK

News / Manufacturer



Britten-Norman's first Islander to be fully assembled in the United Kingdom from detail/component level has successfully completed its maiden flight from Bembridge Airport, Isle of Wight, at 14:25 on Thursday, 3 September, officially entering its flight-test campaign. For operators assessing the Islander programme, this first flight is significant because it demonstrates the maturity and resilience of Britten-Norman's supply chain.

The company now manufactures the entire airframe at Bembridge under its own production control, replacing the previous model of receiving major sub-assemblies for final assembly. A second aircraft is already advancing through the same production line, components for subsequent units are on order, and Britten-Norman is moving toward a continuous manufacturing rhythm aligned with its strategic target of eight aircraft per year. The company remains the UK's only civil A2-approved aircraft manufacturer.

Assembling the airframe at Bembridge gives Britten-Norman direct control of the build sequence, the tooling and the quality gates, and removes a road movement of major sub-assemblies across Europe from the middle of every aircraft. Both bear directly on on-time delivery, and both allow

customer specification to be built in during assembly rather than fitted afterwards.

Approximately 350 Islanders are in service across more than 70 countries and six continents, and the fleet has flown around 20 million hours. Twin engine configuration with single engine inoperative capability, Lycoming O-540 and IO-540 powerplants and Hartzell variable pitch propellers are all long-established across that fleet, supported by a worldwide parts and maintenance network and by CAA, EASA and MoD design approvals. An operator taking a new Islander is taking an aircraft whose behaviour on a short wet strip is already documented across 350 aircraft and 20 million flying hours.

The line is being staffed for the ramp as well as tooled for it. Bembridge has assembled Islanders at more than 30 aircraft a year, and the people who did that work are training the people who will do it again. Peter Dowers, who joined as a fitter in September 1978 and completed his 500th Islander with 2317, has spent this year passing on airframe build to the shop alongside fit out.

Callum Trueman, who began his apprenticeship mentored by Mr Dowers in 2006, is now a Production Manager at Bembridge. He commented: "Being an apprentice under Pete's leadership, I learnt a lot from him and now the whole team have had to learn and engineer this aircraft pulling on Pete's knowledge, which going forward will help us create a quality product at rate. This aircraft is Pete's 500th and my first, and the next one is already on the line."

The aircraft is destined for the Falkland Islands Government Air Service and will move into the final stages of its programme on completion of flight test.

Richard Milne, Chief Operating Officer at Britten-Norman, stated: "Operators want to know two things. Will the aircraft do the job, and will it arrive when we said it would. The first has been settled for a long time. Assembling the airframe here is how we settle the second, because it puts the sequence, the tooling and the quality standard in our own hands."

Britten-Norman is opening the Bembridge production line to operators and to media. Enquiries about production slots and specification should be directed to the sales team.

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