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600th Aircraft Takes Flight at Pacific Aerospace

Hamilton-based Pacific Aerospace Limited marked a significant milestone on July 18 as its 600th aircraft rolled off the production line and took its maiden flight. Bound for aerial survey duties in Australia the aircraft will first have a series of role modifications carried out by Aeromotive Ltd across the field.

"Pacific Aerospace has been manufacturing aircraft in Hamilton for over 50 years and we've grown to become the largest aircraft designer and manufacturer in Australasia. We've exported aircraft to every continent except Antarctica," said CEO Damian Camp. Thirty one 750XLs have rolled off the production line. Ten are wearing New Zealand registrations although not all are working within New Zealand.

It's just about ready. New PAC 750XL owners Gary Criddle (L) and son Jeffrey from Bankstown, Sydney with Damian Camp (CEO PAC)

Within the last six months the Company has undergone significant upgrades in engineering, production and marketing while also investing in updating its facilities adjacent to Hamilton International Airport and its equipment. There is also a new corporate structure and name, Pacific Aerospace Corporation Limited is now Pacific Aerospace Limited (PAL).

"For our staff and new shareholders, we're also treating this milestone as a catalyst for the future with demand for the PAC 750XL aircraft at a record high. Six months ago, we only had aircraft orders one to two months out. We now have contracted orders going into 2008," he said.

Mr. Camp predicts the Company will need to double its production output over the next two years, which will be challenging in the current labour market, with high interest rates and with the high Kiwi dollar eroding company earnings.

Phil Esdaile of Utility Aircraft, California, looks after the North American market for the 750XL. He notes the current up turn in acceptance of the aircraft is having benefits all-round.

"With all new aircraft, improvements are identified and are being integrated into the current production line, Aircraft in the field work hard and are flying and doing their jobs, with minimum down time," he told Aviation News.

"The first role the PAC 750XL entered was in the skydiving industry, here it has proven to be the most efficient, cost effective and safest jump plane in the world. These facets along with its reliability and ease of maintenance are making the 750XL the envy of DZO's everywhere. Every operator reports the same; the 750XL has exceeded all expectations."

Not content with the skydiving role the aircraft is also now taking on the survey industry. In this role the aircraft is out fitted to stay airborne for up to 10 hours a day, flying at very low levels (about 150 feet AOL). Some of these aircraft are flying over 1800 hours per year in the most extreme areas of the world. With the 750XL's high lift wing and power from its PT6A-34, along with the company's capability to manufacture for special purpose missions it becomes a highly desirable platform for this line of work. Along with full IFR certification for passenger and cargo configurations are now providing a safe, cost effective alternative to operators of all types.

More recent developments include the fitting out of the interior as a utility transport for use in underdeveloped areas. One aircraft is already at work with Adventist Aviation, a mission service in PNG.

A further role sees the aircraft in the agricultural role. As improvements are developed they are being integrated into the existing fleet in the form of Service Bulletins and Letters. This is the sort of real world development that often takes other aircraft years of operation to establish.

Two aircraft currently are serving in this capacity. Agricultural work is a tough proving ground and quickly identifies areas to target for improvements. Fittout involved the installation of hopper to carry 3000 kg of fertiliser product. Operating from hill country strips the 750XL will sow product up to 18 loads per hour. With new bulkier product to spread, operators are excited to have the 750XL available for this demanding role and production of the CRESCO (the 750XL's older, smaller brother) has come to a close. For the immediate future the production line is booked with seven aircraft confirmed for operators in South Africa, PNG and Italy. A basic 750XL sells for US$1.3milion before customer options re added.

In addition to the potential of the PAC 750XL the company is also working on a number of promising opportunities for its CT-4E basic trainer aircraft with these opportunities likely to be realised within the next twelve months. This would mean reopening a parallel line for this aircraft alongside the PAC 750XL production line or alternatively licencing the production of the aircraft to a major purchaser of the type.