

Business feels the pinch



Rocky finance markets and high oil prices make for a muted NBAA, as Liz Moscrop reports

This year's annual National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) convention at Orlando showed the first signs that crises in the world financial markets and rocketing oil prices has hit even the super wealthy, albeit at the lower end of that market for now.

Fuel costs are adversely affecting organisations and small businesses that use general aviation. According to NBAA, 85 percent of the companies that use business aviation in the US are small- and mid-size businesses, representing many different types of industry. "Rising fuel costs are having the same adverse impact on general aviation (GA), including business aviation, that is being experienced by other transportation sectors," the association said.

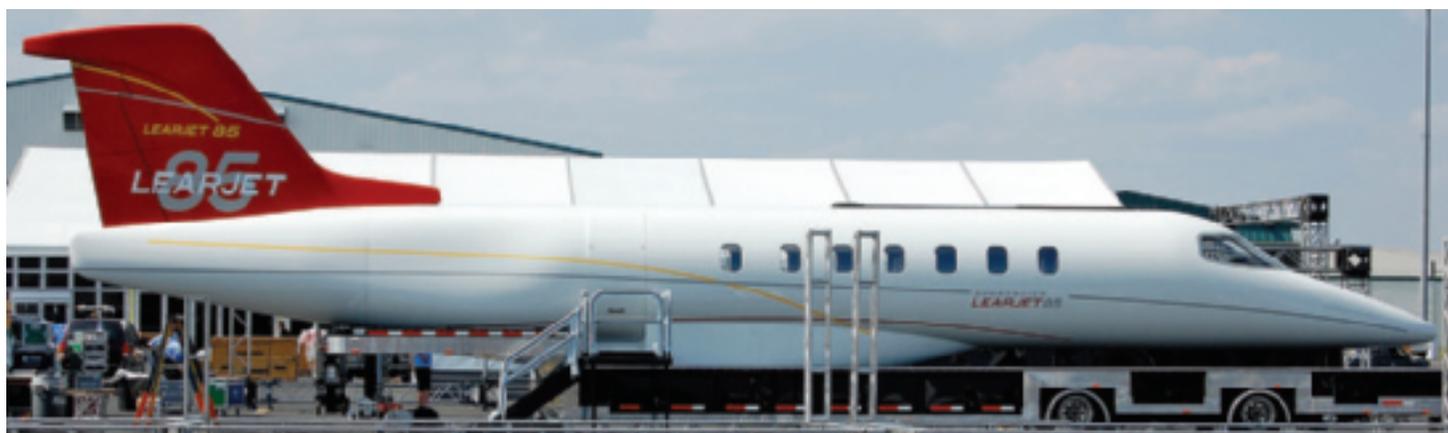
There were fewer big orders and attendance was slightly down on last year's show at 30,811, just shy of the 30,963 turnout in Atlanta. However, there were a record-breaking 139 aircraft on the static display at Orlando Executive Airport. Several manufacturers also brought their wares to the show floor. The show saw the first US outing for Embraer's Phenom 300 and mock ups of Cessna's new large cabin Citation Columbus and Gulfstream's \$60m G650.

The generally sombre mood was reflected in business aviation forecasts discussed at the



Top: a record-breaking 139 business aircraft crowded into the static display area
Above right: Diamond's five-place single-engined D-Jet is still selling well
Right: Embraer's Phenom 300 made its first appearance in America

Photos: Mike Vines



Top: the show featured a full-sized mock-up of Bombardier's Lear 85
Left: Dornier intends to restart production of the Seastar, seen here at Paris in 1989
Lower left: seaplanes figured strongly, including this Viking Twin Otter
Below: the visiting aircraft park - attendance was high but not a record

Socata North America, said that the plan is to build a faster, "much larger" aircraft with more payload and cabin space. More fuel in the wings brings the tanks' capacity to 292 gallons. Chabbert said: "The extra 90 nm means that a ferry flight can go directly from Iceland to Canada 50 percent of the time depending on the winds."

Unusually, seaplanes made a big impact at this year's show, with five companies promoting their wares, including the Dornier Seaplane Company, which announced it would restart Seastar production after a short run ended in 1991. The composite 12-seat aircraft is powered by twin Pratt & Whitney PT6A-135As, set together above the wing for a pusher/puller configuration. Chief executive Joe Walker outlined its attractions: "Because it's a flying boat and not a boat-modified airplane, it's one of the fastest seaplanes out there at 180 knots," he said.

Supersonic aircraft developer Aerion announced that it would become a technology partner rather than a brand when an OEM steps up to the plate to manufacture the supersonic business jet. Former Bombardier executive vice president John Holden, who led development programmes such as the Global Express and Challenger 300 has now joined the team to work on a "proof of concept" as it heads for a projected 2014 certification. Aerion vice chairman Brian Barents said he hoped an announcement of a new partner would be made by the end of the year. ■

show, with several analysts predicting a sharp decline in orders, with some cancellations. The largest order announcement came from Brazil-based Lider Signatures, a Hawker Beechcraft dealer, and authorized service center, which placed an order with the OEM for 23 aircraft worth approximately \$200 million.

New products

Gulfstream Aerospace announced a new aircraft, the \$24m 3,400nm G250, which will succeed the G200. EADS Socata also confirmed that it will build a new larger twin-engine general aviation turboprop codenamed the NTx, standing for "New Twin" with 'X' meaning the as yet unspecified number of passengers. Nicholas Chabbert, president of





The working helicopter market remains strong, with good business done at Helitech. Pat Malone reports

September 16th, the 100th anniversary of Sam Cody's first powered flight in the United Kingdom, and where are you going to be? Portugal, of course – for Helitech, held for the first time in southern Europe. In contrast to NBAA, held the previous week, there was little talk of financial uncertainty at Helitech, which moved this year – the 'off-year' for Duxford – to Lisbon. While there were several British exhibitors and visitors, the crowd was essentially different from that at Duxford, predominantly southern Europeans interested in the central focus of the event, firefighting helicopters. Not something there's much call for in Britain. But while we had a rotten summer and rarely saw the sun at home, the Mediterranean had a hot, dry summer and Spain in particular suffered water shortages and forest fires. The main languages spoken at Helitech this year were Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and Greek.

More than 1,350 visitors came to see 108 exhibitors from 18 countries – Helitech, of course, prides itself on the quality of visitors rather than the quantity, and actively discourages those who do not come to do

business. The most impressive helicopters were the huge, robust twin-turbine Kamov 32s with their counter-rotating rotors. There were three Portuguese firefighting 32s on display, and the best thing that can be said about them is that while the Russians don't do pretty, they certainly do useful. Although the double heads look awfully complex, they're engineered in such a way that field maintenance is said to be relatively easy. The 32 family can lift five tonnes and 13 people, and in its firefighting role carries a 5000 litre bucket.

British exhibitors included Hayward Aviation, who have near-saturation coverage of the helicopter insurance market in the UK and a major presence in France and elsewhere, but who find there's room for expansion in southern Europe. Also present were Adams Aviation, Bristows (not strictly British any more), and London Helicopter Centres, which was marketing its recently-obtained an EASA avionics design approval. They're now able to design and install avionics mods, major and minor, and the design approval means you don't have to pay the onerous EASA minor mod fee. LHC has also become European

distributor for the Analyser box, a US-manufactured system that cuts the time it takes to track and balance a helicopter, and equally importantly, radically reduces the number of times you have to stop and start the helicopter during the operation. LHC's managing director (and Helicopter Club member) Mark Souster was giving demonstrations of the system and sold quite a few. It's hugely impressive. You can wire up everything at once – main rotor, tail rotor, cooling fan if you have one – run the engine and get all the information you need to do the job, then shut down and go and sit in the office to work out what you have to do. The systems are \$10 to \$15,000 each, and Mark Souster is operating three of them – what with reduced engineers' times they'll pay for themselves very quickly, he says, and customers appreciate the reduction in the number of start-ups. We've come a long way from a paintbrush on a stick.

Interestingly, Mark was among those who mentioned the cost of fuel as a factor that was increasingly occupying the minds of helicopter owners. "The percentage of operating costs that fuel now represents is far more significant," he said. "Fuel costs are coming down with the oil price, but new taxes on Jet-A1 are going to hit the industry hard. We find that owners are increasingly concerned."

Former Club chairman Elfan ap Rees, who owns the advertising vehicle Helidata, said prices seemed to be holding up despite all the talk of recession. "As ever, it depends on what you're selling," he said. "If you've got a Long Ranger, prices are firming because they're like gold dust, but every helicopter is different."

Helitech exhibition director Sue Bradshaw said she was delighted with the success of the expo. "We've had a lot of interest and help from the Portuguese national and local authorities, who have never seen a show like this before," she said. "Feedback from exhibitors and visitors demonstrates that the location is popular, and we know that strong sales have been reported and many contracts signed. We're providing for a whole new market that hasn't traditionally come to Duxford and we will definitely be staging Helitech again in Lisbon in 2010."

For your diary – Helitech 2009 takes place at Duxford from 22 to 24 September 2009. See www.helitech.co.uk ■



Above left: Kamov KA32 - the Russians do practical rather than pretty
Above: the emphasis in Portugal was on firefighting applications for helicopters