Going Full Tilt

Bell/Agusta Aerospace Co.'s BA609 commercial tiltrotor (see photo), which flew for the first time in full airplane mode last month, reaching a speed of 190 kt., will be flown to a maximum speed of 293 kt. in the next two weeks as the flight test envelope continues to be expanded, says Jack Gallagher, executive director for Bell/Agusta programs. On Aug. 5, the aircraft flew in airplane mode with the proprotors turning at 84%—the nominal setting for cruise flight—and the pilots reported that noise and vibration levels were significantly below expectations despite the absence of sound-attenuating materials in the fuselage. During routine inspections this month, new fuel control units and engine nozzles will be installed on the Pratt & Whitney PT6 engines as part of a planned upgrade program. Gallagher says a majority of test flights this summer will be focused on evaluating the aircraft’s aerelastic and stability characteristics as well as handling qualities in sideslips and dives. A second BA609 is being built in Italy and is scheduled to fly by the end of the year, followed by a third in 2006 and a fourth in 2007. The flight test program leading to certification late in 2008 will require about 4,000 hr. of flying, according to Gallagher.

Greener Pastures

Goodrich has lost Rick Schmidt, its chief financial officer, to a new company formed out of the commercial aerostuctures business sold off by Boeing. Schmidt, an 11-year veteran at Goodrich, will become CFO of Spirit AeroSystems Inc., the Wichita, Kan.-based operation sold by Boeing this year to Onex Corp., a Canadian private equity company. Goodrich has replaced Schmidt with Scott Kuechle, who has served as the company’s comptroller since last year. Financial analysts predicted that Schmidt’s sudden departure will have little impact on Goodrich, which has benefited from the upswing in commercial aerospace business.

Ready To Fight

The first production MH-60R (see photo) took to the skies at Sikorsky's Stratford, Conn., facility late last month during a 90-min. flight that included a series of flight control and engine evaluations. The U.S. Navy plans to buy 254 of the helicopters to conduct antisubmarine and surface attack missions. The MH-60R will replace aging fleets of Sikorsky SH-60B and SH-60F aircraft. Lockheed Martin is teamed with Sikorsky to integrate the mission systems and digital cockpit. The first MH-60R is scheduled to be delivered to Lockheed Martin's facility in Owego, N.Y., later this month to begin the integration process.

Learning Curve

The NASA National Center for Advanced Materials (NCamp), which is housed within the National Institute for Aviation Research in Wichita, Kan., recently conducted a survey to obtain feedback from the U.S. aerospace industry on current and future use of composite materials. The results are intended to provide NCamp with information about which composites should be added to the shared material database. When asked if their company would use more advanced composites if certified material properties were more readily available, 68% of respondents said yes, 10.5% said no and 21.1% were uncertain. In addition, 18 of the 19 respondents indicated that it would be helpful to include compatible adhesives for the co-curing process in the database. Detailed survey results can be accessed at www.niar.wichita.edu

Green Light

The European Commission has given Boeing and Lockheed Martin approval to create the United Launch Alliance (ULA), bringing together their Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV) operations. Given a glut of launch capacity worldwide and the fact that the ULA is focused on U.S. government business, the approval was essentially a formality. The Commission centered its review on whether the arrangement would lead to a consolidation of the commercial launch market, where Lockheed Martin remains active with Proton through the International Launch Services venture and Boeing with Sea Launch. Although the EC determined the EELV “does not increase the risk of coordinated behavior, compared to the situation pre-merger,” it did promise to look closely at further consolidation activities to ensure the “competitiveness of this key industry in Europe.”

Tapping TsAGI

TsAGI, Russia’s leading aerospace scientific institute, has opened a new facility for testing the strength and fatigue characteristics of composite fuselage structures. The work is being done under contract from Boeing using unique rigs (one already is operating in Seattle, the other is in Moscow) developed specifically for testing of the new 787. The tools are designed to simulate the full range of loads on fuselage panels sized up to 10 X 10 ft. Plans call for testing eight panels this year.