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Skylander SK-105 Well-suited for Africa and Predicts More Than Aircraft in Region

The 19 passenger Skylander SK-105, by GECI Aviation, itself a division of GECI International, is designed to fill a company described void in the market.

“We saw that there was considerable potential in this CS23/FAR23 market, where there are few aircraft in service and they are aging,” said Serge Bitboul, GECI International CEO. “We decided to design a totally new aircraft with the most modern systems.”

A large part of the funds for the project have been provided by GECI International equity capital. They have also benefited from regional development incentives, repayable advances and research tax credit, and private investments. “Various investors, such as local authorities, have

been approached to take holding in the capital of GECI Aviation, said Bitboul.

Since the introduction of the concept almost 11 years ago, the design has seen a few changes. “Today, the design of the aircraft has been completed. Aerodynamics has been optimised, the mass of the aircraft is under the target and we have started the production of the tooling, parts and sub-assemblies by the industrial selected partners,” said Bitboul. “The work done by the Sky Aircraft design department, based in Chambley, Lorraine, France, enabled us to design of an aircraft with exceptional aerodynamics and unequalled performance in its category.”

The industrial partners involved have started to manufacture the parts

and sub-assemblies. The final assembly of the prototypes will begin in the second half of this year for a roll-out and a first flight in the first half of 2012. The ground and flight tests will have duration of 12 months, for certification of the aircraft in the first half of 2013, following with first customer deliveries.

Airlines Africa asked Bitboul to describe if and why the SK-105 is suitable for the African airline environment. “The Skylander is designed to operate as well on unpaved runways, without infrastructures, as on airports. It has exceptional performances, in terms of maximum cruising speed, rate of climb—a synonym for safety in hemmed-in areas—range, and take-off and landing distances. With a state of

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Skylander SK-105 Well- suited for Africa

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the art anti corrosion treatment, the Skylander can also withstand extreme temperatures, on high altitude terrain, up to 10,000 feet.”

“It is therefore the ideal aircraft to serve isolated areas in Africa, with varied applications: transport of passengers, freight, perishable goods, medicines, evacuations for health reasons, etc,” he continued.

Sky Aircraft projects it will deliver more than 1,500 aircraft, between 2013 and 2030. More than 250 aircraft, about 25 percent of which, are intended for African operators.

The Skylander is described as a particularly versatile aircraft, capable of handling many types of assignments. Its 28 m³ cabin, the largest in its category, can hold up to 2.7 tons of cargo in bulk or on pallets, and it can be arranged in combined versions, with 12 or 14 passengers plus freight for example.

“Skylander is designed to go to places that other planes can’t reach, for example, isolated areas that have no airport infrastructure, but the SK-105 is also at ease on the asphalt of airports,” said Bitboul. “It is the ideal aircraft for reaching people, allowing them to travel, to receive goods or to ship their products to the major consumption and distribution centers.”

The Skylander’s commercial portfolio currently includes more than 600 aircraft, with operators from the four corners of the world. Memoranda of understanding and letters of intent have already been signed for 14 aircraft and the company expects to announce new orders at the upcoming Paris Air Show.

Building a new aircraft is one thing, but building the support network is where the real total life cycle support system is where the cost of ownership will be won or lost. “We are developing a network that will allow



Serge Bitboul

the Skylander to offer the best customer support in its category. It has four main centres in Europe, Africa, the Asia/Pacific region and the Far East, a worldwide network of MRO partners, and it offers AOG work 24 hours a day, seven days a week and centralized management of spare parts available throughout the world, Bitboul assured *Airlines Africa*. “Each operator will receive the electronic documentation and a technical representative will help to bring the aircraft into service.”

“The Skylander also benefits from the worldwide technical support of its main suppliers such as Pratt & Whitney Canada, Sky Aircraft is committed for an excellent customers support, all over the world,” he continued.

So what are the next steps for the SK-105 from here? “We have brought together internationally-renowned subcontractors and suppliers of equipment and systems for the program,” said Bitboul. “They were won over by the quality of the design work and the programme’s sales potential: Pratt & Whitney Canada, Cobham, Hartzell, Zodiac, SEFEE, Saint-Gobain, Heggemann, Béringer, Figeac Aéro, Mazair, Lauak, etc. These companies can guarantee the high level of quality that is sought and they have the industrial capacities needed to increase the rate of production of the SK-105.”

The Lorraine final assembly line should be capable of manufacturing 50 units per year as of 2015/2016. “When we have reached the cruising speed in 2019, annual production will be 110 aircraft.”