

Sky Aircraft Gets Ready for SK-105 Production

Sub-assemblies of the rugged Sky Aircraft SK-105 Skylander 19-seat STOL twin-turboprop transport are due to start arriving at the company's Chambley-Bussières facility in north-east France in the second half of this year. So says Serge Bitboul, chairman and CEO of GECI International Group, of which Sky Aircraft and Reims Aviation are both subsidiaries.

"We have subcontracted all Skylander manufacturing and will do the final assembly at Chambley," Bitboul told *ShowNews*. Four prototypes will be built, two each for flight and static/fatigue testing. Investment to certification is in the region of EUR165 million.

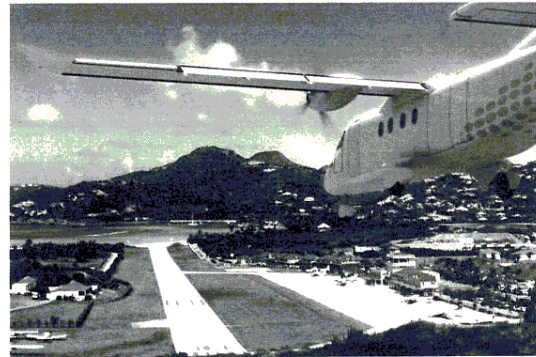
The Skylander, originally co-designed by the late Desmond Norman (of Britten-Norman Islander/Trislander fame) was first announced in 2001. "It has outstanding aerodynamics, with a new, cleaner design that has eliminated the need for wing struts, and an extended, more aerodynamic, nosecone is standard. We are very happy with the design. We started with a good project and I believe it is now an outstanding project," enthused Bitboul said.

"We believe we have a very simple and robust aircraft," he says, viewing the PT6A-65-powered Skylander as a Shorts 330/Twin Otter replacement, able to operate from short bush airstrips. "There

are just 4,000 parts in the structure instead of the typical 15,000-20,000 for a comparably sized aircraft. We are coming in under our target weight and have 95% of suppliers on board, which means our target price will be met."

The aircraft's fixed tricycle landing gear has been changed to single rather than dual wheels, and the company has invented a 'lift killer' which dumps lift on wheel contact, making braking very efficient. Landing distance in 19-passenger configuration is predicted at 450 meters, while take-off run is quoted at 432 meters. Even in +35°C conditions, landing distances are expected to be around 510 meters, Bitboul says.

Initial production will focus on the passenger version that is also designed to carry LD2 freight containers, but combi, VIP, medevac and pure freight versions are also planned. Military and government agency presentations are scheduled. Bitboul expects 20 potential sales



The SK-105 Skylander will be capable of very short landings.

initially, with North America, Germany and France on the potential sales list. "French interest is not only for a liaison aircraft but also for military pilot training."

The Skylander's 2.7-ton load-carrying ability within its spacious 28-cubic meter cabin is also a big selling feature, and its general simplicity of operation and economy will make it ideally suited for special missions and border and maritime patrol. A floatplane version is proposed.

"We have received requests from operators all over the world: Uruguay, Belize, Nepal, Laos, Australia, Japan, Nigeria, Angola and the Middle East. The first aircraft delivery will probably go to the Asia-Pacific or Africa regions. Orders from China are probably non-existent

because of competition with the homegrown Y-12."

Asia-Pacific is seen as the largest potential sales region, with 35-40% of orders expected as economies grow there. Another 40% would be split between South America and Africa/Middle East, 15% to Eastern Europe, and North America 5%. Bitboul believes a production run of 1,500 Skylanders is possible between 2013-2030. "We have 14 formal agreements (to purchase the aircraft) and expect a lot more to be announced here at Le Bourget. We have a portfolio of customers which could involve sales of around 600 aircraft," he told *ShowNews*.

The price of a passenger-configured aircraft with glass cockpit avionics and lavatory is \$7.6 million.

—Mike Vines