



EMBRAER'S KC-390 TEST PROGRAM IN FULL SWING

News / Manufacturer



In an industry sector seemingly synonymous with delays, cost overruns and unanticipated snags encountered during protracted test programs, Embraer's KC-390 twin-jet military transport aircraft appears to be an exception. According to Paulo Gastão Silva, Embraer's program vice president, the test flying - which began in October 2015 - has routinely validated design modelling, and the two prototype aircraft are performing as expected. There have been bumps in the road, but those have been due to external factors, and have been accommodated.

"We had some re-planning on the program last year because of budget constraints in Brazil," he told reporters at the Farnborough Airshow in July, where the jet made its international debut in the static display. "We have kept the planning and program fully on track - we will have certification in the second half of next year, and the first production aircraft will be delivered to the Brazilian Air Force in the first half of 2018."

As of late September, the two prototypes had logged over 500 hours of what Silva says will be a 2,500-hour test program. The ambitious-looking schedules have been achieved, in part, by ensuring that the KC-390's increasingly frequent public appearances are also folded into the test program.

For example, as well as using ferry flights from Brazil to the UK to hit test points, an independence-day flypast over Brasilia on Sept. 7, saw the jet flying in formation with two F-5

Tigers: the fighters took up pre-contact positions they would adopt for air-to-air refuelling, with pilots reporting smooth flying behind the aircraft. At least six of the 28 production aircraft ordered by Brazil will be used in a tanker configuration, though Silva points out that every aircraft off the line is capable of carrying out this task.

The schedule for the rest of this year and in to 2017 will include comprehensive crosswind and icing tests, for both the platform and the mission systems. "We have two different [ice certification] campaigns," Silva says. "One, we install a simulation of accumulated ice, and we fly performance and flying-qualities tests; then we have another campaign in the real environment to confirm the ice threshold on the aircraft."

On the same trip that included the Farnborough visit, the jet also called in Portugal, the Czech Republic and the United Arab Emirates. Czech and Portuguese companies are heavily involved in KC-390 manufacture - Argentina is also a partner on the program. While Silva would not be drawn on whether marketing was progressing as well as testing, he is optimistic that additional customers will soon sign up. "Other orders will come," he says. "We are sure that our partners will have this aircraft operating with their air forces very soon."

30 OCTOBER 2016

SOURCE: AVIATIONWEEK

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