



CIRRUS EXPANDING ASIA PACIFIC PRESENCE

News / Business aviation



As Cirrus Aircraft nears FAA certification of its Vision SF50, the first modern civil single-engine jet, the company is highlighting a growing presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Regional sales director Graham Horne is on-site at the Cirrus exhibit in the U.S. Pavilion (Stand Q91).

Although Cirrus didn't bring any airplanes to the show, visitors can get updates on the various programs, including model year features and color schemes for the piston-single-engine SR20, SR22 and SR22T (turbocharged) models, as well as updates on the VisionSF50 program.

With a number of orders in the region, Cirrus Aircraft's Asia Pacific representation now includes sales personnel in Korea, Japan and the Philippines and service centers in Korea and Japan, with one planned for the Philippines. Cirrus is wholly owned by China Aviation Industry General Aircraft Co.

FAA certification and delivery of the first Vision SF50 jet is scheduled to occur in the first half of this year. Cirrus has a backlog of 550 orders for the \$1.96 million (2012 dollars) all-composite jet. Pilot training has already begun for Cirrus employees, and CAE is in the final stages of preparing the Vision Level D full-motion simulator for the type-rating program. Simulator training will take place at the Cirrus Vision Center, which is under construction at McGhee Tyson Airport in Knoxville, Tennessee. The center will include two buildings, one a factory service center and the second a customer center, which will house the simulator, delivery center and sales and marketing offices.

For customers, Vision training will begin about six months before scheduled delivery, starting with

online training and culminating in the simulator and with the type-rating check ride. Cirrus will also offer pilot mentors to help new owners transition to operating the jet. “We will be working closely with customers to provide the solutions they need,” said Vision SF50 project manager Matt Bergwall.

The training program will be run by Cirrus, because most jet buyers have owned or currently own a Cirrus piston single. “We decided since most are owner-flown, we know our customers best and want to control that experience and set them up for success,” he explained. The initial type rating program should take about 10 days, possibly less for pilots with turbine experience.

The three Vision SF50 flight test jets have flown more than 1,000 hours, and Bergwall expects that number to reach about 1,500 by the time of certification. Remaining tasks in the certification program include FAA testing, natural ice testing and some function and reliability testing. The plan is to have flight-into-known-icing approval completed by the time of certification, he said, “so customers can utilize the full [capability] of the jet.” The new aircraft can fly as high as 28,000 feet and as fast as 300 knots, while needing less than 2,500 feet to take off over a 50-foot obstacle.

Bergwall has flown the Vision jet about 10 hours, and said he has learned during that time how easy it is to fly for current Cirrus SR pilots. “For customers who have been flying the SR, I think they’re going to find the Vision quite a logical step up,” he said, “including where the controls are, how it feels, and the same familiarity of the SR. It will make the transition hopefully easier. It’s a really simplified cockpit. And the nice thing about a clean-sheet design is that we can really think about, ‘Do I need this knob there?’ We can figure out what’s really needed.”

The Vision has a true sidestick for flight control, and this will be new for SR pilots used to the piston model’s side-mounted yoke. Bergwall said that flying the Vision jet still feels very similar to the SR, even with the new sidestick. Despite no previous turbine engine experience, he said after an hour he felt comfortable in the jet. Takeoffs, although likely using more runway than the SR, “feel like you are getting off quicker and accelerating faster,” he said. “It’s weird when pushing in the throttle to hear a jet engine.”

One control that is the same on both the SR and the jet is the fully castering nosewheel, which should make SR pilots feel at home. The jet also is equipped with a ballistic parachute system, which sets the Cirrus airplanes apart from most competitors. The jet’s Garmin-based Perspective Touch avionics suite is also familiar to owners of many SRs, as are the built-in envelope protections that help prevent loss-of-control. Unlike the SR series, the Vision jet features an angle-of-attack indicator, plus a stick shaker and pusher system. It also is equipped with three touchscreen avionics controllers, which aren’t available in the SR.

Cirrus currently builds about 300 SR piston single-engine airplanes per year. Once the Vision jet is fully ramped up, Bergwall said, it should reach a rate of more than 100 per year. “We’re very excited to get it into [owners’] hands,” he said. “We are at the finish line, talking to the first customers and about how excited they are and how some have been with us since 2007.

“I truly think that this airplane is going to help enhance this industry and bring people in who never thought they would be part of it. It feels like we’re creating a new category. Our owners are savvy individuals, and they have figured out that even though this is the slowest jet out there, it’s still quite a bit faster than their current airplane. I think with this airplane, with its low price point, we’re hoping it will bring people into aviation who might not think of personal travel as attainable.

“The Vision jet will be the solution to many of them. And it will encourage them to learn to fly. We’re hoping that the jet brings that to the next level, and will [attract] people who may not have

[considered buying a Cirrus] because it had a prop in front.”

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