



VIKING AIR LTD. IS WORKING TO REVITALIZE 11 CL-215S, WHICH ARE CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST WATER BOMBER CONFIGURATIONS

News / Events / Festivals, Manufacturer



From 1969 to 1990, Canadair produced more than 120 examples of the purpose-built CL-215 water bomber. Since then those airplanes, and the turbine-powered follow-on CL-415, fought fires by dropping millions of gallons of water scooped up into a set of large internal tanks.

Availability of aviation gasoline and the maintenance efforts required to keep the craft's World War II era radial engines running have grounded many of the original CL-215s. However, the airplane still is considered one of the best water bomber configurations, so Viking Air Ltd. of Sidney, British Columbia, Canada, purchased the line's type certificates and has plans to keep the fleet flying.

"We bought 11 of them, the 215s with the radials," said Viking employee Matt Moore. "We're going to start conversion this fall, and the first one is due out in 2020."

Viking's upgrade effort will switch the powerplants to turbines, add winglets, add additional vertical tail surfaces, and upgrade the panel and avionics to current, state-of-the-art equipment. Water capacity climbs to 1,600 gallons after the upgrade. Converted planes will carry the model designation CL-415EAF.

One of the planes scheduled for the change was on Boeing Plaza during EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2018.

A common pilot complaint about the CL-215 is a propensity for still-burning embers to enter the cockpit through open air vents. Cockpit air conditioning should eliminate that problem and improve overall crew comfort.

Assuming the CL-215 conversion effort goes well, Viking may start manufacturing brand new airplanes under the designation CL-515.

The big yellow bomber has been a popular attraction on the plaza. When asked what the most common question AirVenture attendees have about the plane, Matt said, “The main thing is they want to know, ‘How does it pick up water?’”

A pair of scoops extend from beneath the plane and fill the tanks in about 12 seconds. Bomb bay style drop doors empty the water in substantially less time.

Matt said, “I think next year I’m going to build a sign.”

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