

BELL SHOWCASES VIP HELICOPTER OPTIONS

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The oil and gas sector may have the rotorcraft industry in the doldrums, but demand for **VIP-configured helicopters** is percolating, and **Bell Helicopters** (Booth N2132) is showcasing its offerings for the executive vertical lift market here at the NBAA Convention.

Leading Bell's display is a mockup of the MAGnificent VVIP cabin interior developed with Mecaer Aviation Group (Booth N2516) for the Bell 429 GlobalRanger, which brings a new level of luxury to the light-twin category. "This class of customer wants a more jet-like standard in terms of comfort, and they're willing to pay the price," said Patrick Moulay, Bell's v-p of global sales and marketing. That price is "about 30 to 40 percent more expensive than a standard 429 interior," based on desired appointments, he said. Bell expects to sell from five to 10 429s with the deluxe interiors annually. A Bell 429WLG, which features optional retractable landing gear in place of the standard skids, is also being shown here at the show.

Also highlighted is the Bell 505 Jet RangerX light helicopter. A clean sheet update of the popular Bell 206 JetRanger, more than 350 orders have been placed since the Jet RangerX was unveiled in 2013, and 80 percent of them will be operated as owner-flown helicopters, Moulay said. Certification is expected early next year.

The Bell 407, which Moulay described as the company's "bread and butter for many years," has also been "very strong" in the VIP market this past year. "It's the only [light helicopter] with club lounge seating," which some customers prefer, in contrast to the open cabin designs competitors in the class offer. On display here is a407GXP, introduced earlier this year, which features a Garmin G1000H glass cockpit.

Meanwhile, the in-development Bell 525 Relentless fly-by-wire medium lift helicopter, designed for the utility market, is drawing "stronger than expected" interest from VVIP buyers, as well, accounting for some 10 to 15 percent of orders, Moulay said. "Each aircraft is going to be different from the others. The VVIP customers who can afford this kind of product are not going to buy anything off the shelf." Certification is expected in 2017, when deliveries to utility customers will commence, with the first VIP configuration deliveries expected in early 2018.

Said Moulay, "We believe we have the products in every class that can meet the different VIPcustomers' expectations."

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