

Piper Touts Updated Flagship, New Trainers in Singapore

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Piper Aircraft, U.S.-based manufacturer of piston and turboprop aircraft for the training, business, and general aviation markets, lands at the Singapore Airshow touting a new version of its flagship M600; two new "value-priced" trainers; and the introduction of in-house additive manufactured parts to its aircraft.

The big news on the single turboprop M600/SLS (Safety, Luxury, and Support), introduced in October and now in service, is its HALO system, incorporating Garmin's Autoland, making this the first G.A. aircraft to include Autoland as standard equipment. Piper President and CEO Simon Caldecott called HALO "one the most significant advancements in general aviation history."

Designed for engagement in the event of pilot incapacitation—either automatically or when manually activated—Autoland takes control of the aircraft, selects an appropriate airport, and then flies, lands, and stops the aircraft on the runway, all while communicating with air traffic control facilities and passengers.

The SLS cabin features Piper's deluxe EXP interior package as standard, offering colour palettes with custom materials, stitching patterns and contrasting threads, along with veneer and trim finishes. Piper's other pressurised M-Class models are the turboprop M500 and piston-powered M350.

At the other end of the fleet, Piper has added two "value-priced" aircraft to its trainer lineup, the Piper Pilot 100 and Pilot 100i—both priced at \$259,000 (SD \$350,000)—that are VFR equipped, and available in limited quantities beginning this year. Pilot 100 models feature a 180-hp Continental Prime IO-370-D3A engine and Garmin G3X Touch avionics. The Pilot 100i offers an IFR capable upgrade package (the U.S. \$285,000).

Spokesperson Jackie Carlon was mum on impending news on the eve of the show, but given Piper's recent focus on the training market and regional demand, there's always the possibility it could announce another of its training fleet mega sales. The company inked an order for up to 240 trainers from L3 Commercial Aviation (for L3's Airline Academy training sites) last April, the largest civilian fleet order in its history. That on the heels of a 2018 purchase of 152 aircraft by China's Fanmei Aviation Technologies, Piper's exclusive distributor in the People's Republic, at the time its largest civilian fleet sale.

Piper's trainers include the single-engine Archer TX; diesel-powered Archer DX; and piston twin Seminole and Seneca V.

Meanwhile, 93-year-old Piper is bringing its production line into the digital age, introducing last July its first production part—a component within the climate control system—made in house with 3D printing, or additive manufacturing (AM) technology. Piper established an AM centre in 2018 and has been identifying parts suitable for AM, which can save production time and cost, employing an H.P. Multi Jet Fusion 4200 3D printer to create them.

"We can create parts on-demand, control quality, increase our speed from engineering to manufacturing, and focus on building the aircraft," said Caldecott, noting AM has resulted in savings of "up to 200 per cent on certain parts."