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RUAG proposes light SAR option

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Philip Smart | Avalon

Swiss firm RUAG is perhaps best known for its engineering and component services (having bought Rosebank Engineering in 2012), but one part of the company has put the Dornier 228 twin-turboprop utility aircraft back into production as both a regional airliner and cost-effective special mission platform for the Asia Pacific.

RUAG Aviation's Philippe Ermi, attending the Avalon Airshow with a civil Dornier 228NG from Australian customer GAM Air, said the rugged, unpressurised utility aircraft was as capable in roles such as maritime patrol and search and rescue as it was in opening civil passenger and cargo routes in under-developed regions of the world.



RUAG is marketing a special mission version of the Dornier 228; here is a passenger version of the aircraft on display at Avalon 2017. Credit: Philip Smart

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"There are a lot of countries using a big aeroplane for doing the same thing this aeroplane can do at a fraction of the cost," Ermi told ADM at Avalon this week. "If you look at countries operating the same kind of mission with a 295 (Airbus C295) for instance, and consider the cost of that aircraft, at the end of the day they do exactly the same thing."

He attributes this partly to technical advances in sensor and communications systems that are reducing the size and weight of added equipment, but also their footprint and power requirements, allowing great capability with a 6,400kg aircraft powered by two 776 shaft horsepower turboprop engines.

"Power consumption is coming down, with radar becoming more efficient," he said. "It's less power consumption and it's less weight and less space."

He pointed to the aircraft's unpressurised, square-section fuselage, which simplifies modifications such as sensor systems and specialist bulged observer windows and helps maximise use of internal space around sensor consoles and other equipment.

The Dornier's high wing enables a clear view of sea contacts for observation and photography, while its low-speed handling, 224-knot cruise speed and ability to stay on station for up to eight and a half hours make the aircraft ideally suited to special mission operations at altitudes between low level and 10,000 feet.

An in-flight-operable 'roller door' allows search and rescue crews to air drop equipment and supplies, while retractable undercarriage reduces drag and ensures a clear field of view for the under-fuselage radar and optical sensors.

RUAG believes it is the only aircraft manufacturer that can deliver a maritime patrol version straight from the factory, providing a 'standard fit' Telephonics 360-degree radar and Wescam electro-optical sensor pod and a selection of communications and mission management systems if customers elect not to choose their own fit. The options list is extensive, including side-looking radar, search and rescue direction finders, visible line scanners and microwave radiometers.

More than a dozen of the special mission version are in service with specialist operators such as the German Central Command for Maritime Emergencies, the Finnish Border Guard, Royal Thai Navy, Italian Army and Bangladesh Navy.

RUAG is geared to produce up to 12 228s per year at its Oberpfaffenhofen facility near Munich in southern Germany. The company built six in 2016 and plans another five this year.

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