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NEWS



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GENERAL AVIATION OPENING UP

GA manufacturers prepare to ramp up

Optimism is high as companies bring back workers in early May

April 30, 2020 By Thomas B Haines

Like executives in other industries, leaders at general aviation manufacturers have taken a variety of paths to weather the COVID-19 pandemic.

From closing up shop to full speed ahead, each has done what they felt was necessary in their particular case. And like other businesses, they are now looking for ways to keep their companies going while dealing with the new realities of social distancing, face masks, and frequently sanitizing hands and equipment.



A **Cirrus** spokesman said the company began to make workplace adjustments because of the coronavirus in early March. While aircraft production mostly stopped in recent weeks, the company began to slowly ramp up production at the end of April. “We developed a comprehensive set of policies, adjusted processes, and revised schedules to safely increase plant activity,” the spokesman said.

Piper kept aircraft manufacturing going at a normal rate, according to CEO Simon Caldecott. The company has a large

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backlog of flight school airplanes. However, flight schools are facing their own COVID-19-related challenges and have not always been able to pick up their new airplanes.

CubCrafters has arranged its Yakima, Washington, factory such that employees can maintain acceptable distances from one another, said President Patrick Horgan.

Textron Aviation (Cessna, King Air, Citation) acted quickly after the virus began affecting the United States with a rolling [furlough](#) of many of its 7,000 U.S. employees March 23 to April 23.



In an earnings call on April 30, Textron reported that piston aircraft sales climbed from 36 to 54. However, they delivered 23 business jets in the first quarter of 2020, compared to 44 in 2019. Caravan sales declined from 21 to just 5 in that period. King Air sales were down by half from 23 to 11 in 2020. Bell helicopters delivered nine military helicopters in the first quarter of 2002 compared to eight in the same period in 2019, but, it also delivered only 15 commercial helicopters, half the number of 2019.

Bombardier laid off some 11,000 workers in Canada, suspending operations in Quebec and Ontario until early May. But, this week it began recalling workers under a plan



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to slowly resume production of airplanes, trains, and other products by May 11.

Honda Aircraft also suspended production of the HondaJet Elite during the worst of the outbreak. Honda expects many employees to be back at work starting May 4 at the Greensboro, North Carolina, factory.

While **Aviat Aircraft** continues to produce its Husky backcountry airplanes, it has also implemented a number of changes to its Afton, Wyoming, factory.

Garmin has continued manufacturing, but has taken steps to protect its employees and the avionics shops that count on Garmin.

“First and foremost, our concern is for our fellow Garmin associates,” he continued, “but immediately following that is to ensure continuity of business for our customers that depend upon our product and services.”

Avidyne Corp. increased production of new products at its Melbourne, Florida, factory in December. Then, when the company had to shut down manufacturing because of statewide restrictions, it could still deliver products and supply parts and service to its customers. They expect to begin a gradual ramp up of production starting May 4.

- A – Altimeter
- T – Tachometer
- O – Oil Temperature Gauge
- M – Manifold Pressure Gauge (If applicable)
- A – Airspeed Indicator
- T – Temperature Gauge (For each liquid cooled engine)
- O – Oil Pressure Gauge
- F – Fuel Gauges
- L – Landing Gear Position Indicator (If applicable)
- A – Anti Collision Lights (For aircraft manufactured after March 11, 1996)
- M – Magnetic Compass
- E – ELT
- S – Seat Belts

And if you happen to be flying at night, just add FLAPS:

- F – Fuses
- L – Landing Light
- A – Anti Collision Lights
- P – Position Lights
- S – Source of Power

Although the pandemic has had a major impact on the economy, numerous executives we spoke to were bullish on the future. Piper’s Caldecott was especially optimistic, noting that the company is still receiving strong inquiries for

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new aircraft and has made several sales in recent weeks. Aviat's Horn said he has sold four aircraft in the past three months. He expects that once people are back to work, sales for new avionics will rebound.

Caldecott said he believes that flight training will ramp up quickly because the long-discussed pilot shortage is real and will continue to be an issue for years to come.

Meanwhile, some people will be reluctant to travel on the airlines for the foreseeable future for fear of exposure to the virus, he said. GA airplanes could be a good alternative for many such missions.

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