

MRO

Aerospace Magazine

A large commercial jet engine is the central focus of the cover. Two technicians in blue shirts are working on it. One is inside the engine's core, and the other is standing outside, looking at the engine. The engine is white with green and black accents. The background shows the interior of a large hangar with other aircraft parts visible.

Engine Lease & Exchange

IAI sees strong
market recovery

Farnborough Airshow

Aviation industry
returns to Farnborough

Cabin Retrofits

Cabin interior
refurbishments are back

Industry Interview

Pär Gulle, Managing Director
Täby Air Maintenance

Currently, six Emirates A380s are fitted with the new premium economy.
Photo: Emirates



Cabin **interiors** market sees revival in upgrade projects

Several airlines put cabin refurbishments on the backburner for the past few years and now the interiors market is looking to regain the 10-year period of uninterrupted growth before the pandemic hit. **Keith Mwanalushi** reports.

In June, senior executives in the aircraft cabin interiors market returned to Hamburg for the Aircraft Interiors Expo (AIX) show after a three-year hiatus with some 12,000 attendees gathered, and many painting an optimistic outlook for the future of the sector.

The pandemic had an impact on airlines' ability to upgrade their cabins but on budgets but the folks at HAECO for instance have experienced an encouraging level of recovery led by single-aisle fleets. "In particular, carriers with large domestic or leisure route structures have invested in adding their layouts to their fleet or have adjusted their layouts for additional seat capacity," tells Doug Rasmussen, Group Director, Cabin Solutions at HAECO.



Doug Rasmussen, Group Director Cabin Solutions, HAECO

Rasmussen indicates that the twin-aisle market has been slower in recovery, but with travel to the U.S. without testing requirements now opened up, HAECO are starting to see revived interest in upgrading these fleets. "Also, we have seen growing interest in adding premium economy seats as this cabin provides airlines with the highest yield per square inch of floor space, compared to economy and business classes."

In fact, in 2021 Emirates announced a major retrofit programme to equip 120 aircraft in its fleet with premium economy in addition to other cabin enhancements. When providing an update on the programme, Richard Jewsbury, Divisional Vice President UK at Emirates



Emirates is upgrading its premium economy cabins on the A380 and 777s.
Photo: Emirates



Richard Jewsbury, Divisional Vice President UK at Emirates.

tells *AviTrader MRO* that the 18-month retrofit programme will see 67 Emirates A380s and 53 777s fitted with the new product. "Currently, six Emirates A380s are fitted with the highly lauded cabin and we've received very positive response with travellers amazed by the quality and comfort," says Jewsbury.

The retrofit programme will be entirely conducted at Emirates' Engineering Centre in Dubai from November. On a four-class Emirates A380, the premium economy cabin is located at the front of the main deck with 56 seats laid out in a 2-4-2 configuration. On the 777, up to 24

premium economy seats will be installed in a dedicated cabin section between business and economy.

Emirates' premium economy seat is covered in anti-stain leather with stitching details and a wood panel finishing. Each seat is supported with six-way adjustable headrests, calf rests and footrests. The new seats offer a generous pitch of up to 40 inches, the seats are 19.5 inches wide and recline eight inches into a cradle position with ample room to stretch out. Other touches include easily accessible in-seat charging points, a wide dining table and side cocktail table.

By the end of the programme, Jewsbury reports that Emirates will have 126 aircraft fitted out with premium economy seats. "It is a major investment to ensure we continue to serve our customers with the best experiences in the sky," he says

It is interesting to see several A380s making a comeback as airlines like British Airways and others scramble for capacity after the pandemic. Emirates has no plans to remove A380s from service and Jewsbury informs that the A380 will

remain Emirates' flagship for a while yet. Currently, Emirates operates to 130 passenger destinations using the entire fleet of over 140 777s and more than half of the A380s. "By the end of the year, we are aiming to operate close to 90 A380s across our network. For us, the iconic double-decker has redefined the travel experience and it will continue to be a vital pillar of our network plans."

Delivering on airline expectations and innovation

Recently, AJW Technique Interiors announced that Air Serbia was the launch customer for SkyLeather – new synthetic material for seats. The synthetic 100% polyurethane material will be installed on their fleet of A320 aircraft. The radical new material is vegan, eco-friendly, lightweight, and durable, as well as being soft to the touch, antimicrobial, easy to clean and available in various colours and grain. According to AJW, as well as substantial cost savings, the polyurethane material has low levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and is formulated to allow an easier fitting process for complex

seat shapes - meaning seat covers stay the same shape and look freshly installed for longer.

Sohaib Ahmed, Programme Manager – Interiors at AJW says one of the deciding factors on selecting this product was the significant fuel savings the material will afford which contributes to Air Serbia's commitment to introduce sustainable products wherever possible across the organisation.

"In addition, we are also working with major low-cost carriers and some of our large, contracted customers to support them with their cabin material requirements," Ahmed adds.

AJW Technique Interiors exhibited for the first time at Aircraft Interiors EXPO in Hamburg this year, which Ahmed reports as having generated enormous interest from many major carriers in the service and products AJW is introducing to the interiors market. "Our plan to leverage our considerable experience within the supply chain and the MRO markets by mounting a one-stop-shop, bespoke interiors offering onto the tried and tested template of our world-class parent entity, AJW Technique in Montreal, which has certainly driven a huge amount of interest in the world of interiors," he stated.

Ahmed informs that seat cover manufacturing, carpet kitting, headrest covers, literature pockets and life vest pouches are also on offer, along with



Sohaib Ahmed, Programme Manager - Interiors, AJW



There are several operator transitions happening since COVID.

Photo: Ascent Aviation Services

significant savings driven by economies of scale all delivered from one factory location, which offers reduced shipping and manufacturing costs and convenience for the operator.

At HAECO, the cabin solutions unit in the Americas has been involved in cabin modifications for the past 26 years and has issued over 340 supplemental type certificates, ranging from adding seats to installing complete interiors including new seats, lavatories, galleys, in-flight entertainment system, and enhanced connectivity. In recent times, the unit has been more involved in optimising the cabins of single-aisle aircraft, where HAECO has found ways to reduce weight and install additional seating without compromising the passenger experience.

Cabin interior projects can be overly complex. Rasmussen says on larger scale programmes, there are a multitude of suppliers involved. "It is critical that roles and responsibilities are planned up-front to ensure all deliverables are timely and properly executed. In a global supply chain environment, parts will be secured from many different regulatory environments and all the paperwork and qualifications expectations must be clearly articulated at the onset of the project," he advises.

Before attempting a cabin configuration

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Doug Rasmussen, HAECO

project, Scott Butler, Chief Commercial Officer at Ascent Aviation Services recommends having a full plan up front. He says with lots of operator transitions happening since COVID, operators need to be ready for long lead times with engineering, certification and supply chains. "At Ascent, we try to be the planning focal and working with the operators every step of the way in coordinating all necessary disciplines so we can ensure a high-quality, certified product. We have a strong composite and avionics team which is key in doing the necessary work in-house as changes are made and implemented," says Butler.

From simple LOPA changes to full VIP reconfigurations, Ascent performs the full



There are many complex considerations before a retrofit project is underway.

Photo: Ascent Aviation Services

spectrum of interior work – “We are even in the process of passenger to freighter modifications as many aircraft are going to cargo conversion.”

Butler continues: “Underestimating the certification requirements can cause delays in interior projects. There has been a lot of increased certification scrutiny in the past few years which drive more engineering, testing and analysis with every modification. Always have a good certification plan when looking at the project schedule.”

A one stop approach for bizjet interiors

The shift towards private flying became more pronounced during the recent COVID stricken years but it is also a clear alternative to commercial premium flights. Coralie Wigg, Director and Co-Owner of Starling Aerospace notes that whilst the pandemic had a seismic impact on the passenger airline market, for the private and VIP aviation segment, opportunities arose for the acceleration of cabin interior

upgrades, whilst certain destinations remained inaccessible. “Starling had to adapt quickly by ensuring that our business could remain productive in a COVID-secure environment -we continue to maintain these standards two years on.”

Wigg explains that typically, lead-in times for projects are short, due to the availability of the aircraft. “It is therefore commonplace for us to quote on the basis of delivering a complete bizjet interior within eight weeks.

“For this schedule to be met means we must rely upon the delivery of materials from our trusted UK suppliers, which we prefer to use as it improves the sustainability of our business. Freight costs from the USA and China have also more than trebled in recent months, as well as taking longer to ship, so we are looking closer to home to expand our supply chain,” Wigg states.

Starling Aerospace recently delivered a full cabin reconfiguration on a Boeing Business Jet for a head of state, an

upgrade for a Global Express to increase size of bulkhead monitors, and a refurbishment of a Cessna Citation for a private operator.

“The latter project involved the complete strip-out of the interior, to include the headliners and sidewalls, prior to a full inspection so we were able to log any additional repairs needed.”

Wigg continues: “New patterns were created for the re-upholstering of the leather seats, as well as the fitment of new carpet, white ultra-leather headliner, new sidewalls which were also sound-proofed. In addition, both cockpit seats were stripped and re-upholstered in black leather and grey sheepskin. All the interior woodwork was stripped back and then re-painted with a smoky grey pearlescent paint.”



Coralie Wigg, Director and Co-Owner of Starling Aerospace

Starling is also managing seat upgrades for a number of other commercial, cargo and private operators and the company is finding that operators are seeking out a ‘one stop shop’ approach and that is a major selling point for Starling, to have the ability to offer a complete turnkey package, from inspection and design to fabrication, installation and certification.

“Basically, if it’s inside the cabin, we are able to manage any project,” Wigg states.

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Scott Butler, Ascent Aviation Services