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Rotorcraft Report: Will Mi-38 Fly?

MILITARY | COMMERCIAL

Thanks to \$85 million in new government funding, Russia's Mi-38 helicopter is scheduled to finish test flights this year, states a news release from the Kazan Helicopter Plant. "Serial production of the Mi-38 should begin...in 2010."

So, will there be a market for this medium-lift helicopter, which is targeted for both civilian and military missions? Yes, said Forecast International Senior Aerospace Analyst Ray Jaworowski, but not without some stiff competition.

"Probably the biggest limiting factor on Mi-38 sales will be the continuing popularity of the Mi-8/17 family of helicopters," Jaworowski said. "The Mi-8/17 series will likely remain in production for some time." He added that in terms of market positioning, the Mi-38 appears to be slated as a supplement to that popular helicopter family, rather than an improved replacement.

From a sales standpoint, "The Mi-38 is primarily focused on the civil market, and achievement of Western certification (i.e., EASA, FAA, and/or Transport Canada) is critical if the helicopter is to garner a significant slice of the Western market," Jaworowski said. To achieve this, the Russians will need deep pockets, since the certification process can be "long and costly." On the military side, "the Mi-38 would compete with the Black Hawk, the NH90, and similar helicopters," he concluded. "Its main competition for sales, though, may turn out to be the Mi-8/17."

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