



Neil Russell

Chief operating officer
at Aero Norway

Aero Norway

Ultra-flex

With adaptability in its DNA, Aero Norway has always played to its strengths. The ability to flex effortlessly to meet unpredictable demand is now allowing the business to advance to another level. Aimée Turner spoke to **Neil Russell** who is transitioning from COO to head the CFM56 engine MRO specialist later this year



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AT During the pandemic, Aero Norway was successful in maintaining throughput of complex work in addition to smaller worksopes. To do that, the business had to streamline operations. How has the business built on that innovation?

NR Essentially, we have built on our lean methodology since the pandemic: focusing on how to reduce TATs, how to reduce waste, and the whole philosophy around efficiently managing the process from engine induction to final release.

When Covid hit, Aero Norway transformed within a matter of weeks into offering more hospital type repairs. We just made the decision and it paid off. We can now easily switch service provision to provide six or seven repair bays in addition to the heavy worksopes. Post-Covid worksopes are going to take a while to stabilise, so our ability to adapt is something that our customers really want.

AT This year will present new challenges with engines which have not used up their flight cycles arriving outside their scheduled checks and needing more than a hospital visit. Is the industry prepared?

NR It's difficult to know what our competitors are thinking but, having integrated greater flexibility during Covid, we are prepared for anything. We can manage heavy engine overhauls, or we can have lighter repair worksopes. That's really what we're seeing – a mix of customers doing full heavy shop visits, customers doing limited work scopes and a range of continued type maintenance as well. Aero Norway's whole capability profile has changed.

AT Specifically, what are you seeing in terms of demand for CFM56-5B and -7B and LEAP maintenance worksopes?

NR When it comes to engine maintenance services it's very varied. We are seeing a lot of change in terms of customers trying to get the green time out of their engines: either by the airlines themselves post-shop visit, or by lessors wanting to develop the engine, or even tear the engine down. There's a real mix. For the -5B and -7B we've actually seen more engines for sale and we have a successful buying and selling programme.

AT In terms of inventory management, how will Aero Norway ensure that the business has the necessary material and

parts to service the upturn? Will Used Serviceable Material (USM) play a greater role going forwards?

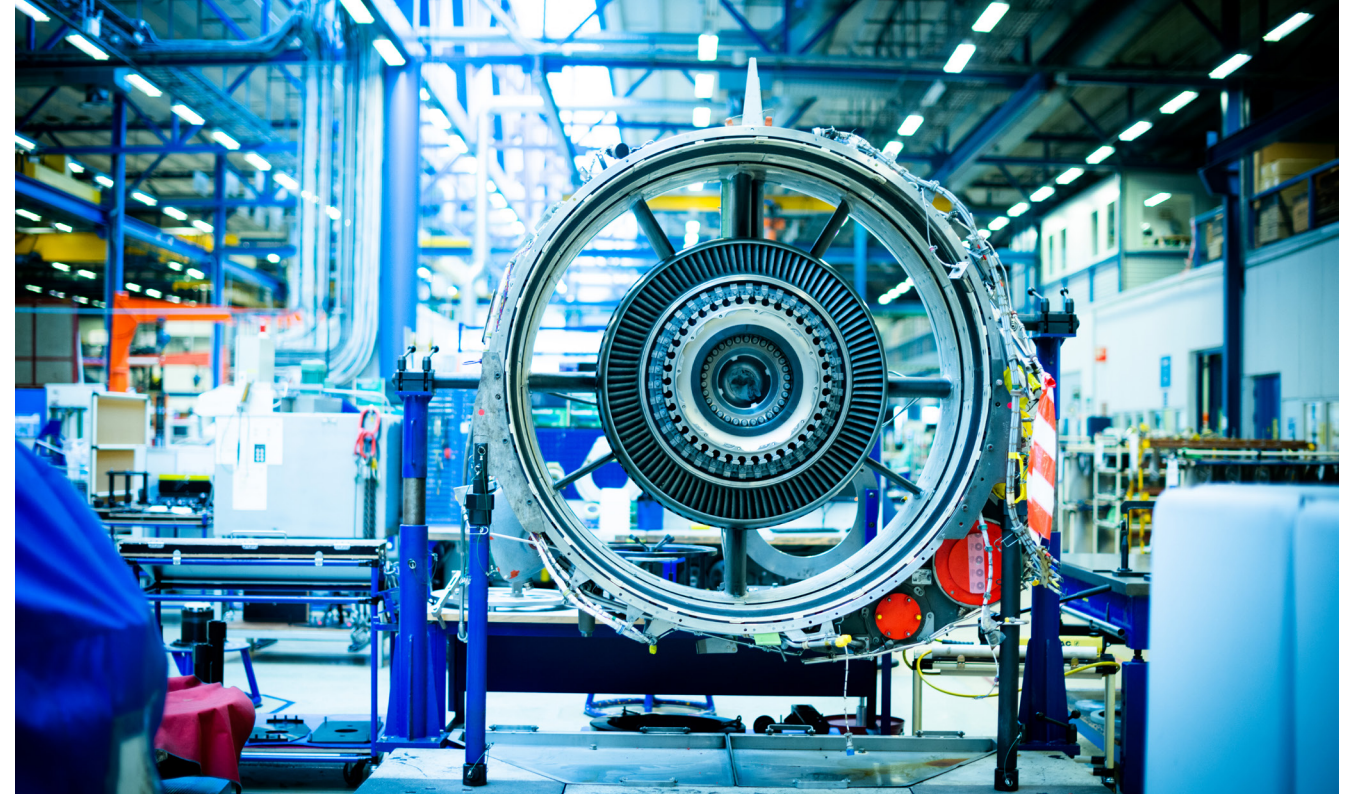
NR USM will definitely play a bigger role. There's a big fleet of -5B and -7B engines coming down the pipeline for MRO services, and for teardown.

Of course there will be engines where customers want to do the full suite of LLPs, but there will be a move towards a requirement for more inventory of USM to manage different types of worksopes efficiently.

We look at our stock management in that way – considering different stock rotation methods, what we need to have and where, we also partner with key suppliers too.



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“We can now easily switch provision to provide six or seven repair bays in addition to the heavy worksopes”

anyone go. We did have some turnover of course, but we have actually had staff coming back to us, which is a good sign. We work to retain our talented staff by having feedback sessions and surveys to see what we can improve and put action plans in place; it's one of our biggest focus areas as a business.

We also have a successful two-year apprenticeship programme where we take on between four and six apprentices who are guaranteed a job if they meet the level which backfills our retirements. We successfully recruit locally and internationally employing 26 different nationalities here in Norway at this time.


AT What investment have you made and are planning to make in your business and what does this indicate about how you see that MRO market and your activities evolving?

NR Just before Covid, we significantly moved over to -5B and -7B, although our -3 work kept the business going. Currently we're transitioning back towards having more -5B and -7B in the shop – taking up about 70 per cent of our workload – and that will continue to be a significant part of our business. Now we want to further develop our back shop for internal repairs.

We've already been growing that quite significantly in the past five years with new machinery, including a high-speed grinder and plasma machine.

Our next phase will look at other types of process investments to help reduce our TAT. In terms of how we finance our investment it has always been organic. We've never looked outside for investment but we're always open to that aspect as well.

AT Have you made progress in inducting LEAP 1A and 1B engine MRO capabilities this year?

NR We have a process for getting both on to our capability list. When you introduce a new engine, it's always important to carefully assess what customers need. So as an independent MRO we can precisely define, in terms of cost and investment, what path to take. We want to be learning as we go, so we'll start off with a limited workscope capability and build up. 

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