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Kitplanes maker set to venture into local and regional markets

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AFTER having successfully produced kitplanes for export to the US, Phileo Aviation (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd is set to venture into the local and regional markets for such sports airplanes.

Based on the company's survey, Phileo Aviation general manager Dr Lim Kong Loong said the company believes there is a niche market for between 10 and 12 of such aircraft per annum in the country.

Apart from that, he said with the strong Government backing in promoting flying, this will encourage more people to venture into sports aviation.

"Just like leisure boats which are enjoying overwhelming response, the time has come for sports aviation to be part of the changing Malaysian lifestyle," he told reporters in Langkawi yesterday.

Phileo Aviation currently produces the RV-6 kitplanes claimed to be the best seller in the US.

The aircraft are being produced at its 10,000 square feet plant at the Glenmarie industrial area in Shah Alam.

Dr Lim said production began in November last year, and the company had exported four units of the single-engine RV-6 which comes in two variants, namely the RV-6 and the RV6A.

The RV-6, he said, is a "tail dragger" model, which means that it has two main landing gears located under the wing, supported by a third small wheel at the tailplane.

The RV-6A model, meanwhile is a tricycle model with the third gear located at the airplane's nose section, or commonly referred to as the nosewheel. This aircraft is a single-engine, low wing monoplane made out of aluminium.

Composite material is being used for its wing tip and engine cowling (cover) and is ideal for recreation, transportation and training.

The aircraft is currently being displayed at the inaugural five-day Langkawi Oshkosh East Fly-In convention and exhibition which ends on August 8. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad officiated at the opening of the event.

Dr Lim said currently Phileo Aviation receives the airplane's components from its main manufacturer, Van's Aircraft Inc of the US.

"We do a lot of metal working on the parts to shape them into an airplane," he said, adding the main parts were the fuselage, horizontal tail and wings.

These parts are then re-exported back to the US where they are sold as kitplanes. Since November, the company has re-exported 28 aircraft.

"We assemble about 49 per cent of the aircraft and the owner has to complete the rest, including mounting the engine. This usually takes about 1,000 hours of construction time before it is ready to fly," he added.

On the company's plan for the domestic market, Dr Lim said the company would have to increase its production capacity, but stressed that this will also depend largely on market demand. The aircraft is being sold at a promotional introduction price of US\$54,500 (US\$1 = RM2.61) until August 31.

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