

Police Aviation News

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PAvConSPECIAL REPORT

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SPECIAL REPORT

PAvCon Europe Police Aviation Conference

For those attending I am certain it can be emphatically stated success was in the air. The same was said about the last face-to-face event in Amsterdam in 2019 but they were very different events. The 2019 event was of necessity cramped and difficult at times, the 2022 event was free and easy and held at a venue with plenty of space.

This year's event included something of a pent-up need to get meeting each other in person. Nominally a two-day event the main show was preceded by a training day aimed at police tactical flight officers at a hotel in the town whilst also acting as the setting up day for exhibitors at the airport. Three dates for a two-day conference and exhibition does cause confusion for those unfamiliar with the format but, with travel to and from, for most it takes up at least four days of their lives, so you sometimes need to pay attention to the details!

The event was mainly sponsored by Flysight and Leonardo, but it is the nature of the gathering that all commercial attendees play their part financially in its success. In providing a first class venue and staffing at no cost Airborne Technologies were of course effectively sponsoring the event in a major way.

The airport location in Wiener Neustadt, close to Vienna, Austria, is not new, but the host building the event was held in did not exist when PAvCon was last there in 2013. There are two airfields in the town, East is the commercial base for such as Diamond, Airborne Technologies and Schiebel and West is a large underused military area that will in a year or so house the new Vienna base of the police air wing.

The working facility of Airborne Technologies was a whole new experience. A beautiful facility – inasmuch as a mere hangar, offices and workshop can be seen as a thing of beauty – and welcoming hosts go a long way to making any event a success. In this case the hosts piled on the feel-good factor for all of their guests. There was trepidation for many, ABT were after all inviting their 'deadliest rivals' into their centre of excellence. Equally on their part the visitors were accepting that invite. For each it was a matter of discussion no doubt.



Skid delivery, the EC135 swoops in over the Twin Otter ©PAvConEurope

Regular PAvCon attendees will be fully aware that things go wrong at times and that due to 'issues beyond the control of the organiser' a bought and paid for space can suddenly shrink. That happened last time out when at little notice the event was barred from an ample hangar on Schiphol International Airport was exchanged for the more restrict space in a nearby hotel. Thankfully everyone took the privations on the chin and worked from the little space available. Thanks to a very accommodating hotel and its staff the event was declared a success.

This year each of the exhibitors was assigned 2.5 metres of space, but in fact most of them had more thanks to the ample size of the facility and the fact that outside the hangar door was not an International

Airport! It is a lesson PAVCon has learned twice now, big airport, big trouble.

The small airport gave us a static aircraft park this year, an added attraction we have missed for some time now, Warsaw and 2018 in fact.

Inspecting the aircraft at the event, somewhat muted by the heavy rain late on day 1 of the main conference, were the resident airborne test bed Vulcanair P68R OE-FGG operated by Airborne Technologies (ABT), the Viking/DHC Twin Otter demonstrator, C-GVKI, also again staying over with ABT. Over the two days Diamond sent over a variety of examples of their surveillance twins, a pair of Diamond DA62 including OE-FXX, the aircraft scheduled to undertake a tour of the USA in July and August and a SAR configured DA-42 Sentient exhibited jointly with Elbit Systems. The DA42 MPP utilised for this demonstration was equipped with a ViDAR (Visual Detection and Ranging) Pod developed by Australian company Sentient Vision Systems, a Trakka EO/IR gimbal and an AIS receiver, and CarteNav AIMS-ISR Mission Software

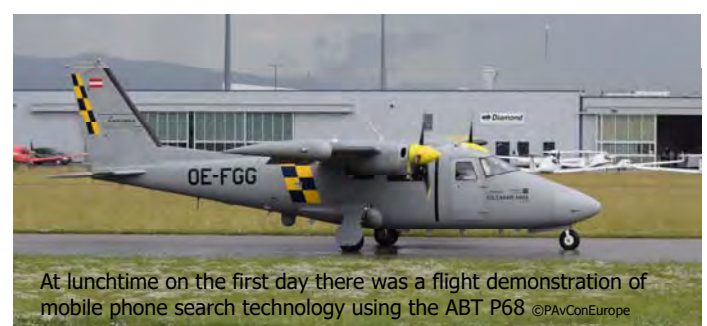
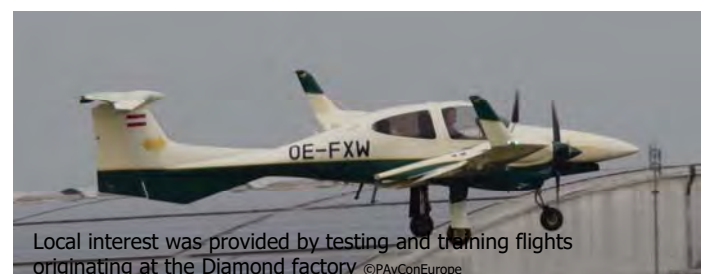
The aircraft came to notice in late October 2021 when it was operating over the North Sea off Belgium when primarily on a customer flight demonstration. That suddenly turned into a real-life Search and Rescue (SAR) mission. All 24 migrants in a small boat in distress were rescued after they were found in record time by the role equipped DA42 temporarily operating from North Sea Aviation Services Ostend, Belgium.

The Austrian Police demonstrated and exhibited one of their EC135s OE-BXG undertaking Rappelling on the first day in the grassy area beside the runway. Next year the helicopter currently operating from the centre of Vienna will move to a new facility being built on Wiener Neustadt West – the military airfield some distance away from the airfield used by PAVCon Europe.

In addition the day-to-day traffic of the airfield filled in the skyline for added traffic—although in fairness most of that was local traffic from the busy Diamond factory across the runway!

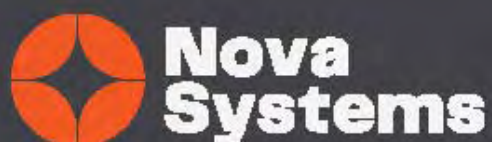
Yes, it rained a fair bit, but the rain did not significantly depress the overall success of the show. The opening hours were dry and sunny and that allowed delegates and visitors ample time to see the demonstration and the static airframes before they were obliged to pay full attention to the indoor displays. On day two the weather was equally kind for delegates to take in the changed aircraft provided by Diamond.

There were some missing companies and organisations you might expect to thrive there. Next door neighbours Schiebel, occupying a factory about 100 metres away, were regularly invited to attend but they simply ignored the approaches. One member of staff from Schiebel called in at ABT but it was nothing to do with the event. The company may have been absent but several attendees who had a growing interest in





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The well attended Conference Room ©PAVConEurope

the unmanned simply assumed they would have a representative on site at the event and were astounded they were not.

Also missing were L3 Harris Wescam and Teledyne FLIR, in both their cases the new takeover corporations (Harris and Teledyne) are exhibiting a strange US corporate tendency not to understand their products. It appears that they are actually halting their sales staff from attending events. The fact that these appear to be events outside the USA suggests that they believe that they are so self-important that the world will come to them at their events in the USA if they want them. Meanwhile, as confusion apparently reigns in the boardrooms of America, the supposed lesser beings in Trakka, Hensoldt and Shotover are meeting their potential customers with attractive non-ITAR products that operate just as well if not better.

After a number of late cancellations, the event found that it had no serving police officers from France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland or, inevitably, the United Kingdom. Some of this can be ascribed to the fact that there was a multi-national training event being held by the police in Amsterdam a week later but it is more likely a boardroom problem.

The conference programme held above the main exhibition in a light and airy room that got a bit hot at times. The decision by ABT to pay a lot extra for sound deadening glass on construction paid off as the room was rarely disturbed by the noises from below – that is a constant problem when the two elements are in close proximity. Another positive tick for ABT.

The first few items of the opening of the Conference were the inevitable welcomes to the resurrected event from the organisers and the host country Austria.

The Deputy Chief of the police air support unit, Mag. Peter Weichselbaun opened the local welcome with Erwin Engelhart providing an introduction to



Two Estonia Police officers chat to David Findley Avalex Technologies.

All things change. This was the last appearance of the Avalex branding. They have been taken over and will now appear under the Mercury banner ©PAVConEurope

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the operations of police air support in Austria as a precursor to the short but interesting flight display of abseiling and long line by a unit EC135.

The commercial hosts ABT, teamed up with other exhibitors Smith Myers (the Artemis System) and Horizon (Blackfish) as one of the lunchtime highlights on the first day. The ABT P68, basically still role equipped to the level of the UK NPAS airframes was demonstrating the positive aspects of the mobile phone search and rescue capabilities using a fixed wing aircraft. Austria and the mountains was very much a theme of the event, with the subject being covered the following day with a rival drone fit system from Lifeseeker. The real sting in the tail of this technology though was the recent war zone advice that darker forces can also see a mobile phone. Carrying an active western mobile phone in the Ukraine is now being advised against.



The programme is still posted on the website so I will not detail the content, suffice to say it was a good mix of safety and technology that attracted good full audiences and that suggests it was a useful programme. With the delights of the drinks and food counter below there was always the danger that non-stop eating was on the cards.



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Conference highlights included a presentation by military, Home Guard and police speakers from Denmark. The country does not have its own police air operation being reliant upon access to airframes provided by others. Police observers have been carried in military helicopters equipped for the role for many years. In the past the rotary mount was the MD500 and the AS350, currently it is the AS355 twin. Use of light aircraft not equipped for the police observation role remains an option into the future. The venerable SAAB T-17 Supporter aircraft has been in service for around 50 years now for duties including pilot training and a limited amount of police and other reconnaissance work. It is being updated with digital instrumentation and will therefore remain available for decades to come.



The Home Guard in Denmark also supply police and security services with airborne intelligence using their two civil registered Britten-Norman BN-2 aircraft.

At the 2019 event the Turkish National Police presented on the operation and captured attention of the audience with their quite lethal gunships. Just entering service they were certainly considered an unusual police tool then and now. This year the TNP presentation was on their VIP and transport operations. The gunship fortunately was not undertaking the deliveries!

The conference was rounded off, as has become customary, by Joseba Mendizabal from the Basque Police. Although he missed the last event in 2019 as he was on a piloting course it is clear that his last show of the day retains all the attraction it had in the past. Conferences are famous for failing to keep an audience to the last exhibitors and delegates drift off home mid-afternoon and the conference room empties. It does not happen when Joseba steps up to the podium, the room is invariably as full as it was when the show started - his tongue-in-cheek presentation on the lighter side of police aviation, the Country Club attitude of some operations and bosses that really do not have a clue about aviation — or even a decision in them. It is a universal and international problem, always the wrong people get the job of running the operation and that provides endless opportunities for humour to emerge.



This year the airline lost Joseba's suitcase (one of several attendees so afflicted) and as a result Joseba lived for two days in hand-me-downs from other people's suitcases. As a result, the presentation was modified, and Stinky Joe was created. That joke quickly took hold and resulted in a badge being quickly ordered and officially handed over at the Training Course in Amsterdam the following week.

The spirit of PAvCon Europe lives on and clearly knows no international boundaries (so far anyway)!



Mission Accomplished.

Regular readers will have read, perhaps with increasing boredom, about the chequered career of the Vulcanair P68R in UK police service. Sometimes the P68 was declared the wrong aircraft for the task, sometimes it was undertaking the task set for it well. I would say that the outcome was a draw that suggested that someone got the original UK police specification wrong in debatable circumstances. Clearly the three main recipients of this critique have been Airborne Technologies, Vulcanair and NPAS.

It is notable that neither Vulcanair nor NPAS have engaged on the subject. The former recently made a point of cancelling their free subscription to PAN – presumably not wishing to view let alone engage in the debate.

Contrast those attitudes with the recent 2022 edition of PAVCon Europe held at the magnificent facility of Airborne Technologies (ABT) in Wiener Neustadt, close to Vienna, Austria.

ABT is the birthplace of four blue and yellow Vulcanair P68R aircraft owned and operated by the NPAS in the UK, it also was the birthplace of a similar fixed wing P68 Observer operated by the police in Germany and another recently delivered to a French Dependency in the Indian Ocean. ABT know the P68 and produce it to meet the expressed needs of the customer.

In recent years there has been much comment within Police Aviation News about the selection and role equipping of the four P68R for NPAS, most of it was negative and speculative and settled down to 'blame' NPAS for selecting the wrong airframe for their perceived mission. Naturally some of that process resulted in negative comment rubbing off on ABT.

At times there were terse words exchanged on this and other subjects from time to time but at no time was there a disconnect between PAN and ABT. That said both parties were hampered by a blanket of silence enforced on ABT and others by NPAS management. Fortunately ABT has many other customers.

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The point is though that the editor and ABT continued to talk about very real day-to-day issues affecting the aviation industry as a whole. Each was doing their own job. As a result the planning and realisation of the event had its stresses but it was a pleasure to work together.

Contrast this year's PAvCon Police Aviation Conference in Austria with that held in 2017 in Doncaster, UK. – and the years since. As NPAS hunkers down to embrace a deep but silent hurt, ABT has blossomed in a cooperative organisation between, themselves and PAvCon Europe which remains one and the same as the 'negative comment' publication Police Aviation News.

ABT "ambushed" your editor to mark the 25 years of *Police Aviation News* and a really superb working relationship over the past decade and in recent months. Thank you Wolfgang, Markus, Katrin, George and all the team for making the event work.



The result of the 2022 PAvCon Europe event is that forty organisations – many of them direct commercial competitors for ABT – arrived in Wiener Neustadt and talked, took food and refreshment for two full days and got on together. That is the PAvCon way.

I can predict that it is likely that every one of those attendees will have reason to work, collectively or individually, with each other in coming years to enhance the future for all concerned. All those were brought together to meet representatives of nearly a dozen – potential customer - police forces.

WE HOPE YOU WILL JOIN US THE NEXT TIME WE MEET

The image shows the cover of the 'AirMed & Rescue' magazine, Aerial Law Enforcement Edition. The cover features a helicopter in flight over a desert landscape at sunset, with a group of people standing in the foreground. The title 'AirMed & Rescue' is prominently displayed in white and red text. Below the title, it says 'AERIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT EDITION'. To the right of the cover, there is a promotional graphic with the same title 'AirMed & Rescue' in large white and red letters. Below the title, it says 'Subscribe to AirMed&Rescue for all the latest industry news and expert insights to keep you mission ready'.

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