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Alenia Aermacchi SF-260: 900 and still going strong

Alenia Aermacchi has delivered the 900th SF-260 establishing an all-time sales record for the Italian aircraft industry. The SF-260 is the most successful Italian aircraft produced in peacetime. In the past 46 years no less than 27 air forces, several flying schools, aero clubs and private customers have ordered the SF-260 and the SF-260TP (a turboprop-powered variant).

In widespread use worldwide, the SF-260 family of aircraft the benchmark among the screener-primary military trainers. The SF-260's superior training qualities derive from the balance between outstanding performance, excellent aerobatic capabilities and the perfect harmonization of the flight controls around the three axes. The result is an aircraft experienced pilots consider a pleasure to fly. The aircraft is also used by several aerobatic teams.

The SF.260 excels as a screener-primary trainer for military pilots who need to be screened and quickly gain the necessary airmanship before continuing flight training on more sophisticated and expensive trainers.

More than half operators (17 out of the 27) have placed repeat orders which is a testament to the SF-260's qualities and continuing product improvements over the years. In fact, five customers have placed three or four repeat orders for the planes.

The latest versions of the plane on the market are the SF-260E (with piston engine) and the correspondent variant of the SF-260TP (turboprop engine). Both versions are the highest performing aircraft in their respective class and designed to guarantee a smooth transition to the most demanding follow-on trainers. An updated version of this last variant with glass cockpit is under development. A successful Warrior variant, capable to COIN, Counter Insurgency operations is still in service with several air forces worldwide.

Designed in the '60s by Stelio Frati - the famous Italian designer of high performance sporting airplanes since the '50s like the Falco, the Picchio and the Nibbio - the SF-260 made its first flight and was certificated in 1966 by the then Siai Marchetti.

In 1997 the SF-260 become an Aermacchi product and the company overhauled the design with the aim to rationalize its serial construction and simplify the production. This review also introduced a new fuel system, an air conditioning system, a new cockpit specifically designed for the training of military pilots, an autopilot, and state of the art avionics.

The SF-260 also recorded good civil market sales and is considered, because of its unique characteristics the "sports car of the air".