NEW-START IRIS TO OFFER HIGH-END SENSING UAV SERVICES

News / Airlines

A newly created company is preparing to penetrate the unmanned air vehicle (**UAV**) services market by offering **high-end sensing** for commercial applications.

Moving away from the typical offering of an electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) payload, new-start **Iris**, which began trading in July, is hoping to appeal to a market previously untouched by utilising more sophisticated, and subsequently more expensive, payloads, including Lidar and hyperspectral imagers.

“We have the funding to do it properly and go into this in a realistic way with a long-term strategy,” Neil Hunter, chief executive of Iris, tells Flightglobal. “There is always going to be a requirement for EO/IR, but you are only surface-checking with that sensor.

“There is obviously a market for it, but it is a very straightforward market. The next phase is using more complex technology that is now coming down in size and price.”

Iris is looking to operate UAVs on a contract basis because technology develops too quickly to

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make it viable to acquire them outright, Hunter said. It is targeting the energy market – oil and gas and wind farms – plus the powerline-inspection market.

The company has begun discussions with Lidar and hyperspectral imaging-sensor manufacturers that have the technology that can be integrated on UAVs weighing below 20kg (44lb), Hunter said. It will begin services using the multirotor AscTec Falcon 8 UAV, a system routinely used by the oil and gas industry – a market that, he said, has particularly stringent safety requirements.

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AscTec

Iris has set up registered entities in the UK and Norway, and is in discussions or plans to begin discussions with the aviation authorities in each country.

“If we successfully get through demonstrations that are planned in the UK and Norway, we have

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contracts behind them that should materialise by the end of this year," Hunter said.

Oslo has plans to contract an organisation to help integrate UAVs into its regulatory framework, as it does not currently have a ruling for unmanned aircraft. This should aid the introduction of operations like the ones that Iris proposes.

The second phase of the company's planning – which is at an embryonic stage – involves exploiting other types of technology that have not yet been utilised on UAVs, although Hunter could not divulge further information.

"This phase is about having a controlling share of the market instead of being a contractor," he says.

Iris believes that the credibility of its offering lies in the experience of its team, which includes a former Royal Air Force General Atomics Aeronautical Systems MQ-9 Reaper and BAE Systems Nimrod pilot, as well as personnel that have experience in UAV management services with other companies.

"It's all about the credibility of the people that we've brought to the table," Hunter said.

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