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promoting M28 to Africa

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Sikorsky Aircraft and its subsidiary PZL Mielec, in conjunction with South Africa's Safomar, is promoting the M28 light transport aircraft to Africa, and believes the type meets the South African Air Force's maritime surveillance and patrol needs.

Frans Jurgens, International Communications at Sikorsky Aircraft told defenceWeb that the ruggedly built M28 is very suitable for operations across the African continent as it has the best payload and STOL (short take-off & landing) capability in its class. "Africa has a lot of undeveloped or unprepared runways thus making the M28 a perfect aircraft for the continent," he said.

The US Air Force has used the military-qualified C-145A version to fly Special Operations Forces to and from small, semi-prepared landing zones in Afghanistan. "It's a simple, tough airplane that doesn't need much support to keep flying," explains PZL Mielec M28 Chief Designer Mariusz Kubryn. "When you've got to move people or cargo into short, unpaved strips in regions with austere facilities, the M28 aircraft is a highly productive solution."

The aircraft has been modified for the maritime patrol, antisubmarine warfare, and search and rescue (SAR) roles. "We're integrating new systems in a proven platform for new missions," said Kubryn. The M28 has been offered to the South African Air Force for the maritime mission.

Polish aircraft operating over the Baltic and North Seas fly missions up to eight hours duration at patrol altitudes around 5 000 ft (1 500 m). They carry a 360-degree inverse synthetic aperture radar, high-definition infrared/electro-optical sensors, Automatic Identification System, an infrared/ultraviolet pollution detector, and secure data link.

Polish Border Guard aircraft have two cabin operator stations while Navy aircraft with ASW sonobuoy launcher and Magnetic Anomaly Detector have up to four.

"The aircraft have been extremely effective in environmental and fisheries protection, SAR, and other maritime patrol missions," notes Kubryn. "They can overlay ship identities on radar displays and downlink a complete tactical picture to law enforcement."

Elsewhere on the continent, Jurgens said his company has received a lot of interest from relief and humanitarian operators, airlines and the military across Africa, including from South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Chad, Botswana, Zambia, and Tanzania.

South African aviation company Safomar is the sales representative for Sikorsky Aircraft in six African countries. They have been marketing the M28 to operators, governments and the military.

The M28 is built in several guises, including for passenger, VIP, cargo, paratroop, medical, SAR, and maritime patrol missions. "Good endurance and great low-speed handling characteristics are especially powerful advantages in surveillance missions," said Kubryn.

The M28 has good STOL performance and can land on unprepared airstrips less than 1 000 feet (345 metres) long thanks to its high lift wing, thrust reversing propellers and low pressure tyres. It is powered by two 1 100 hp (820 kW) Pratt & Whitney Canada PT6-65B turboprops which are protected by inlet particle separators.

The 16 500 lb (7 500 kg) M28 can carry 5 000 lb (2 300 kg) over 225 nm (450 km). It can cruise at speeds of up to 192 knots (356 km/h) and stalls at 53 knots with engines idling and flaps extended. Service ceiling is up to 25 000 feet with crew oxygen.



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