

TBM 960 Multi-Role Platforms — Firefighting Application



Philippe de Segovia fell into aviation at the age of 14, when he started flying gliders. He was able to combine his passion for aviation with his professional life, first as a journalist for aviation magazines such as *Aviation & Pilote*, of which he was editor-in-chief, then for 25 years as communications manager for SOCATA and then Daher aircraft, including of course the TBM. He is also secretary of the Heritage Avions Morane-Saulnier association.

The dramatic forest fires that have ravaged forests since this spring in both North America and Europe shed particular light on a new use for the TBM: as an aerial lookout platform (Bird Dog) for forest firefighting operations. The delivery of three new TBM 960s to the Canadian group Conair Inc. since last year.

However, this is not a new idea for the TBM, as in 2006 it was proposed as a solution in a tender by the US Forestry Service. The idea was to take advantage of the TBM's three basic qualities—manoeuvrability, robustness, and performance—to identify fire starting areas and assess the level of turbulence before water bombers intervened. In addition, the visibility offered to pilots in an aircraft of this category had been noted. However, at that time, a US government agency could not purchase an aircraft manufactured outside the United States, and the deal fell through.

Dedication of the TBM 850 as a firefighting surveillance aircraft by Jean Barbaud, French cartoonist, comic book author, and animator.



Conair's choice of the TBM 960 therefore seems like a comeback, as it follows the Canadian company's analysis of 50 different types of aircraft.

This is the first time the TBM has been used in forest firefighting operations, which involve continuous deployment of the aircraft over a fire to monitor the affected area, assess risks, and develop strategies for water/retardant drops by tanker aircraft.

Among the many advantages cited by Conair in explaining its choice of the TBM 960, a pressurized turboprop aircraft, are its performance, modern design, advanced technology, high reliability, and the technical support provided by Daher as the manufacturer.

"Conair can count on all the resources of our customer support, Daher Care, and rely on our technical expertise in the field of multi-mission aircraft operations acquired with our TBM and Kodiak aircraft families in service around the world," explained Nicolas Chabbert, CEO of Daher Aircraft, in a press release.

As aerial firefighting missions are very demanding, the TBM 960's features meet Conair's expectations in terms of safety and situational awareness: Daher's TBM e-copilot® digital technology for electronic stability, under-speed protection, and emergency descent mode; single-lever, dual-channel EPECS digital control for the engine and propeller; advanced Doppler radar system that detects lightning and turbulence; and the aircraft's HomeSafe™ automatic emergency landing system.

Matt Bradley, CEO of Conair, said: "We are preparing for the future by choosing the TBM 960 to modernize our fleet. With new aircraft, we can be sure that our surveillance aircraft will not be grounded when we need them most due to a lack of parts, maintenance requirements, or obsolete equipment."

Conair plans to equip its TBM 960s with avionics and equipment specific to firefighting operations, enabling them to communicate with crews of other aircraft, including water bombers, and guide them effectively.



During the 2025 season, the TBM 960s are deployed in Canada, with an officer from a government agency on the right and a Conair pilot on the left. The air attack officer communicates with all helicopter and fixed-wing pilots involved in aerial firefighting, as well as with ground crews, ensuring safe and efficient operations. Mike Benson, director of business development at Conair, said the company's fleet of surveillance aircraft was reaching the end of its service life given the demanding conditions in which they continuously operate, including turbulence, heat, smoke, and fluctuating altitudes.

"The new TBM 960s offer key advantages for aerial firefighting," Benson added. "They are fast and can keep pace with large tanker aircraft; they offer superior visibility, allowing crews to observe aircraft in congested airspace; they can fly low and slow, which tells tanker aircraft where to drop water on a forest fire; and they can be converted into multi-role platforms if our government agency partners wish, incorporating technologies used to map forest fires or participate in search and rescue operations."



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