
Saab 105 in Austrian Air Force

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Today the Saab 105OE continues to form a major fighter and trainer element in the Austrian Air force. Originally 40 examples of this aircraft were acquired from the Saab factory in Linköping in two batches in 1970-1972 to replace the Saab 29 Tunnan. Still some 28 aircraft are operational with the Austrian air force at different airfields.

Several tasks

The Saab 105OE is primarily serving in the trainings role at Horsching air base near Linz providing elementary jet training with the Fliegerregiment 3 where the flying school is located. Totally 20 Saab 105OE are based here and while training is a main task, planes could adopt additional roles easily depending the need of the aircraft for this roles. After basic training the course will be continued with advanced training, training of air defence missions (identification only), basic fighter manoeuvres and air combat manoeuvres. A quite curious extra task is the representation for triple A to provide aerial targets. In this way the air defence from the ground can be practised in simulated attacks. The whole training course includes 1-2 years with the first solo flight after 25 hours and after an effort of 120 hours the status of full operational jet pilot will be reached. After this you may fly with this aircraft in the Fliegerregiment 3 which calls itself the 'tiger squadron'.

Saab 105OE and Sk-60

The only other military user is Sweden where the aircraft is designated Sk-60 which aircraft only have slight differences with the export version Saab 105OE. Some minor details in antenna makes the Sk-60 distinguishable from the Saab 105OE while both types have some small differences in avionics (the Saab 105OE is only fitted with VHF radio equipment and the Sk-60 both with VHF and UHF) however who takes a better look will find two major differences. To meet special requirements from Austria the wing section was strengthened and while airfields in Austria are higher located there was a choice for a more powerful engine. The Saab 105OE was fitted with the General Electric J-85 17B engines with 12,6 kN thrust each. This engines give the airplane a cruise speed of 680 km/h and a max speed of 970 km/h. The design is a light aircraft with much agility and this makes the type suitable for aerobatics resulting in a four ship stunt team in Sweden called team 60 and a very nice tiger coloured aerobatic demonstrator in Austria which was many times present ant European air shows.

Different purposes

Austria can operate the aircraft for different purposes besides training. This includes the ground attack role, reconnaissance and even air defence missions. However the capacity to intercept must be considered of limited value and the aircraft will be practically only capable of identification and to direct intruding aircraft to the border or

to an airfield. For aerial fights the Saab 105 has only the possibility of using a gun pod and must call in a F-5E. However with the acquisition the Saab-105 received electrical wiring for Sidewinder the rockets were not fitting in Austrian policy at that time being a neutral country between Nato and Warsaw pact. Later on Austria bought Saab 35OE Draken interceptors and is using now leased F-5E's from Switzerland in an intermediate period. In 2007 the first Eurofighter for the Austrian air force is expected. In the attack role the Saab 105OE can provide close air support with rocket launchers for 7,5 cm unguided rockets or with a gun pod with 30 mm canon.

In Austria there is northwest of Vienna the location Einstieg for live firing exercises. The Saab 105 pilot is training here twice a year, but only with the gun pods while rockets are preserved for war stocks. For surveillance and reconnaissance flights a special task is the possibility to measure radioactivity in the air. Finally the Saab 105 is capable of use for VIP flights. In this configuration two smaller ejection seats are fitted in the front and a little bench (!) is situated directly behind enabling to fly with 4 persons sitting side-by-side. Austria momentarily has two aircraft flying in this version. The aircraft of Fliegerregiment 3 are only part time in use for this tasks and 8 aircraft are on a long term lease to the fighter elements. Today some 7 aircraft are located at Graz Thalerhof next to the F-5E in Fliegerregiment 2 and active in the surveillance role and training. This training includes representing enemy aircraft in dog fight for the F-5E's. In future 4 will be based at Graz and 4 will return to Zeltweg when the Eurofighter arrives which was also the case in the Draken era.

Is there a future for the Saab 105OE ?

Austria not only sensed the changes in anti terrorism policy since the World Trade Centre attack on September nine eleven in New York, but is also confronted with the obligation to guard airspace with special summits or presence of very important persons. While George W. Bush visited Austria aircraft were constantly in the air in combat air patrols including Saab 105's. They were needed to have enough pilots filling in the long hours in the air changing a plane every two hours. The Saab's were flying with the international emergency frequency of 121,5 mhz highly visible painted on the gun pod to indicate aircraft in a guarded zone to call in at this frequency.

There are plans to have some small upgrades in the avionics with Head Up Displays and flat screens. The work could be done at the own maintenance unit called the Fliegerwerft at Zeltweg but the question is of money can be generated to effort this. At this very moment the Saab 105's from Graz plays an important role in training fighter tactics for the F-5 interceptors and will do so for the Eurofighter too. In a reorganisation effort the Austrian Air force is momentarily adopting a structure with a transport brigade and an air defence brigade. The Saab 105's from all the bases will report to the air defence brigade and while the majority of the planes will stay in Linz they will be unlike the other units there (helicopters and transport aircraft) operating in another brigade.

Due to high fuel costs the number of flying hours of each plane is expected to be

reduced but it is not likely that aircraft will be on non-active. Saab 105 pilots will be able to fly the new Eurofighter Typhoon in coming future but will need a first step on the F-5E to become familiar with next generation cockpit instruments. While flying is flying Saab-105 pilots are expected to have a short transition especially while last generation fighters are more easy to handle in the air. The only new aspect to learn are the possibilities which new avionics can offer you. The Saab 105 is scheduled to fill in the fighter training for some time.

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