

The New Mangusta Is Called AgustaWestland AH-249

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Although it shares the same general aspect as its predecessor, the Italian army's future AH-249 scout and escort helicopter is about 50% bigger, and will be powered by the same powerpack as the AW149 battlefield utility helicopter. (IT Army image)

The Italian army's future scout and escort helicopter was unveiled during the Combat Helicopters 2017 conference in Krakow, Poland.

Last year, the mysterious AgustaWestland AW249 was unveiled almost by accident last year by Leonardo's then-CEO, Mauro Moretti. Since then, months of silence, with no official or unofficial news.

Well, the AW249 is no longer mysterious. It exists and will soon be real, as the new-generation military helicopter that, with the new designation AH-249A, will replace the Italian army's AH-129D (AW129) Mangusta.

AH-249A: SUCCESSOR TO MANGUSTA

The new design, first reported by Defense24.pl, was unveiled at the Combat Helicopters 2017 conference in Krakow, Poland, along with a series of new details on the program. The Scout and Escort helicopter will be fitted with the same powerpack as the AW149 military utility helicopter and will have a maximum take-off weight of between 7-8 tonnes (depending on the version) that will position the new helicopter Italian military slightly above the Airbus

Helicopters Tiger (6 tonnes) and just below the Bell AH-1Z Viper (8 tonnes), but far from the flying AH-64E Apache, Mi-28 and Ka-52 flying gunships. (In other words, it will be over 50% larger than the A-129 Mangusta currently in service—Ed.)

Among the main goals of the Mangusta's evolution is the ability to operate at a performance level comparable to the NH90 and CH-47F helicopters currently supplied to the Italian army's aviation command, something that the AH-129D could no longer guarantee, especially in terms of range.

AH-249A: PERFORMANCE AND STEALTH CAPABILITIES

Greater emphasis was put on performance in extreme conditions. The operating temperature range of the new AH-249A will vary from -40 degrees C to +50 degrees C, and the helicopter will be equipped with components that can protect against dust, sand, snow and corrosion in maritime environments.

Among other details that are still little known is the radar signature. The new Mangusta will certainly not be a stealth aircraft, but as it will be used with scout and reconnaissance missions it will have to be fitted with signature management systems and some ways to reduce its radar cross-section. To this end, the AH-249 will be equipped with infrared signature reduction devices (in particular, for turbine exhaust gases) and a system of active electronic countermeasures and software systems against hacking.

It is also worth mentioning the new helicopter will have the ability to interact with UAVs, both in terms of information exchange and in the management of drones currently in use in the Italian Armed Forces.