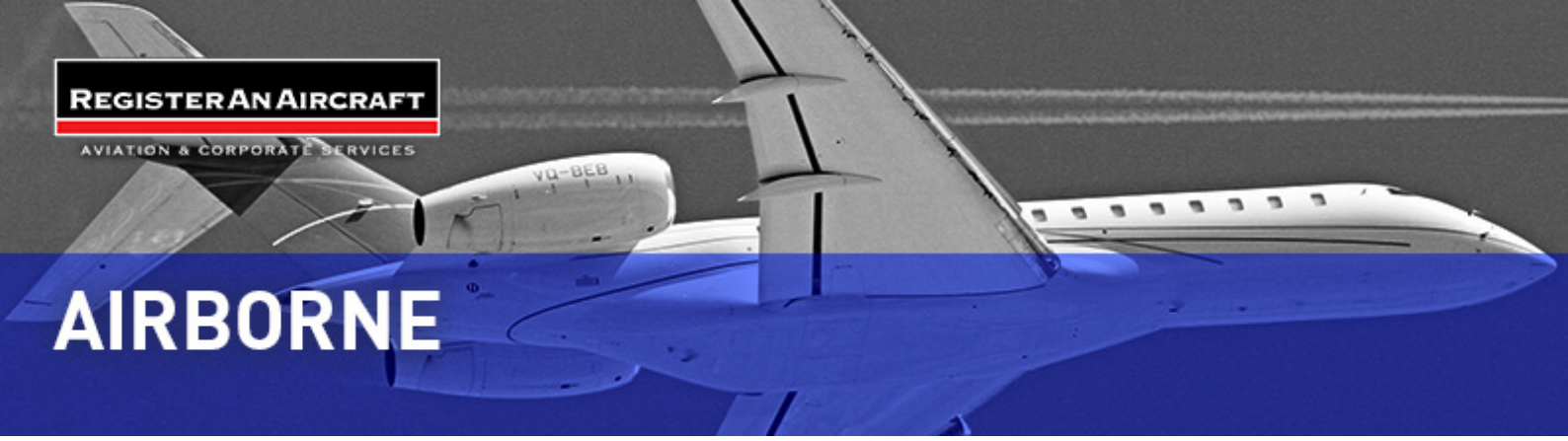

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Indigenous Russian aircraft cannot plug the bizjet gap

Last month's Airborne featured the results of our analysis that showed a 35% increase in the Russian registered bizjet fleet. But the re-registration of Western bizjets is only part of the story. As a direct result of international sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine, it is clear that operators of many of these aircraft will now have problems maintaining them. This will be fuelling demand for indigenous, Russian-made aircraft, but the available substitutes may not prove to be an attractive or viable solution, particularly in the case of what may be described as 'VIP airliners'.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, many older jets such as the Yakovlev YAK-40 and YAK-42, along with examples of the Tupolev TU-134 and TU-154 and the newer TU-204 and TU-214, have seen service as corporate/VIP transports. As sanctions bite, eyes may also have turned to more modern alternatives, such as the VIP version of the Sukhoi SSJ-100 SuperJet. The issue with this aircraft, however, is that its engine – the PowerJet SaM-146 – was jointly developed by Russia and France and is therefore subject to international sanctions.

There are no indigenous bizjets in the light, mid-size or large cabin categories. A temporary solution for many companies may be to charter aircraft from a dwindling number of non-European countries, the UAE for example, that have not applied the same level of (or indeed any) sanctions against the Putin regime. But the options for current operators of such aircraft look increasingly limited by their ability to keep the aircraft flying while Russia remains subject to rigorous sanctions.

Asia-Pacific bizjet fleet declines

The size of the bizjet fleet in the Asia-Pacific region has contracted by 2.4% – some 30 aircraft – according to the 2022 Fleet Report by specialist analyst Global Sky Media (GSM). The total fleet now stands at 1,196 units, with more than half of the top 20 largest operators recording declines in the size of their fleets. China is the largest biziet market in the region, but the number of China-based aircraft fell by 11.2% to stand at 301. However, both the Australian and Indian fleets grew by a net 7%. In its conclusion, GSM attributes the overall fall in large part to continuing issues stemming from the Covid pandemic, including OEM supply chain problems and increased new build prices.

UK bizav facing continued pressures post-Brexit

The UK's business aviation sector continues to face pressures and operational obstacles in the post-Brexit environment. This was the clear message from delegates at the recent British Business & General Aviation Association (BBGA) conference. While the transition period under the UK-EU Brexit agreement ended on 31 December 2022, operators continue to face day-to-day problems. Many of these relate to a lack of resources, including staffing levels at the regulator. Some of these were outlined to Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) representatives, who sought to offer a robust defence of the body's efforts to solve problems and adequately resource new processes. CAA Chair Sir Stephen Hillier made it clear in his presentation that much of the blame continues to lie with the politicians at a UK-EU level and those problems will only ease once outstanding issues, such as the Northern Ireland protocol, are resolved

Global traffic continues to fall

The Easter holiday fell earlier this year than last, which was reflected in recent European traffic figures dipping below pre-pandemic 2019 levels. Despite this slightly exaggerated 'blip', overall global bizav traffic levels remain 10% lower than the same period last year, according to data produced by specialist WINGX. Managing Director Richard Koe said: "There is always significantly less flying during the Easter holidays and as that came earlier this year, the trends are suppressed compared to 2022 and 2019. That said, the deficits compared to 2022 are widening as we move into Q2 2023. This reflects a weakening economic environment and sensitivity to the cost of flying private."

One positive that remains constant is the comparative strength of charter and fractional operations, with overall levels running 24% higher compared to pre-Covid 2019. Current traffic figures in this sector are 15% lower than the same time last year, but this can be accounted for in part by the 'explosion' of demand that followed the lifting of pandemic restrictions.

EBAA mourns loss of Secretary-General

Business Aviation lost one of its most vocal advocates with the sudden death of Athar Husain Khan, Secretary-General of the European Business Aviation Association (EBAA), who passed away on 26 March aged 60. Husain Khan had been in his current role since 2018 but had been heavily involved in aviation for more than 30 years as a high-profile lawyer.

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Greenpeace report refuted by EBAA

The European Business Aviation (EBAA) issued a strongly worded response to a report on bizav activity commissioned by environmental campaign group Greenpeace. Compiled by from research consultancy CE Delft, the report claimed that bizav flights in 2022 from Dutch airports had leapt by 87% over 2021, and by 64% across the EU as a whole. The report also claimed a similarly large increase in CO2 emissions from flights departing the Netherlands.

In its response, the EBAA pointed out that the report was not based on data from Eurocontrol and that its conclusions were distorted by ignoring pre-pandemic data. The EBAA asserted that European bizav in 2022 had in fact grown by only 7% compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019 – the last 'regular' year before travel restrictions were introduced. In terms of CO2 emissions, the EBAA also noted that bizav was an extremely small sector that was responsible for a very small proportion of global aviation emissions – just 0.04% of the total. Finally, the EBAA pointed to the efforts by bizav to embrace sustainability and reduce CO2 emissions as part of a clear, long-term strategy. "Contrary to what Greenpeace wants to believe, business aviation is actually driving aviation sustainability," it said.

Amsterdam Schiphol to ban bizjets from 2025

Amsterdam Schiphol Airport is proposing to ban bizjets from 2025, with a stated aim of reducing noise levels and CO2 emissions in line with the Paris Climate Accords. Justifying the ban, the airport's operator stated that bizav flights caused a "disproportionate amount of noise nuisance and CO2 emissions per passenger". The statement went on to assert that bizav flights produce "around 20 times" more CO2 than commercial flights. The ban forms part of the airport's environmental plan, which includes the cancellation of plans for a new runway along with a ban on non-emergency night flights. In response to the move, the European Business Aviation Association noted that: "Banning business aviation at Schiphol can lead to a significant loss of income for the Dutch economy, while the CO2 savings achieved by banning business aviation is minimal … Flights in our sector almost never cause noise nuisance because they are usually small aircraft."

Fractional flights will continue to soar

The number of flights operated by fractional operators will continue to grow in 2023, according to the latest SherpaReport. The report makes it clear that most operators, from NetJets downwards in terms of scale, are increasing their fleets considerably compared to pre-pandemic levels. SherpaReport president Nick Copley said: "The next 12 months will continue to be very busy for the fractional market. The reasons are multi-faceted, but key trends for increased activity relate to a wider variety of aircraft, shorter wait times to gain access to fractional ownership, a more favourable buyer's market, flexible structures and an increased focus on sustainability."

Corporate aircraft news

Dassault Aviation CEO Eric Trappier, speaking at the annual results press conference, noted that the company's order backlog – currently standing at 87 Falcons – was the highest in the French OEM's history. This was despite cancellations of orders from Russian clients due to international sanctions. Trappier confirmed that the Falcon 6X is on course for EASA and FAA certification by the middle of this year, which will allow customer deliveries to begin. Development of the large cabin Falcon 10X also continues apace with the aircraft expected to enter service in 2025.

Daher announced a number of upgrades to its two turboprop singles – the TBM 960 made in Tarbes, France, and the Kodiak 100 made in Sandpoint, Idaho – at Sun 'n Fun Aerospace Expo in Lakeland, Florida. The TBM will now feature a GWX 8000 StormOptix weather radar and a checklist review button on the yoke. The utility Kodiak 100 will also feature an avionics upgrade and will now be offered with a composite five-blade propeller for Series III models. This will also be offered as a retrofit for all earlier 100s.

The French OEM also used Sun n' Fun to announce its intention to add a hybrid-electric TBM, which is scheduled to be in service by 2027.

AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\

Rockwell Sabreliner 65

CATEGORY
Mid-size jet

MANUFACTURER
North American Aviation/Rockwell Intl.,USA

ENGINE
2 x Honeywell TFE-731-3R-1D turbofan

LENGTH	WINGSPAN
14.25 m	15.37 m

RANGE	MAX. SPEED
4,556 km	861 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY	NO. OF CREW
6	2

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)
10,886 kg

DESCRIPTION

The prototype Sabreliner made its first flight on 16 September 1958, receiving FAA certification just shy of five years later. The aircraft's name reflects what was perceived as similarities in wing and tail with the F-86 Sabre military fighter aircraft in operation with the US Air Force (USAF). It was to satisfy a requirement for a utility trainer/-personnel carrier for the USAF that led to the project's development.

North American Aviation merged with Rockwell Standard to form Rockwell International in 1973. Three years later, the manufacturer contracted with Raisbeck Engineering to redesign the wing of the Sabreliner. This new wing, the Raisbeck Mk. V was mounted on a new variant of the Sabreliner – the 65 (featured here). The 65 was also equipped with the Garrett (later Honeywell) TFE-731 turbofan. Production of the Sabreliner ceased in 1982 by which time more than 800 examples had been built. This total includes more than 200 built as the military T-39 variant. A total of 76 Sabreliner 65 were produced.