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“Truly an Asian exhibition” - ABACE 2017

The sixth annual Asian Business Aviation Conference & Exhibition (ABACE 2017), which was held from 11 – 13 April at Shanghai’s Hongqiao International Airport, featured more than 180 exhibitors, 40% of which were Asian companies. NBAA president and CEO Ed Bolen highlighted the rapid growth of the show since it moved to Shanghai in 2012, saying: “This is truly an Asian exhibition and it brings the international aviation community to China.”

Although ABACE is a pan-Asian event, the focus remains on China – the host and largest market for business aviation in the region. As we reported last month, the Chinese government is making significant efforts to encourage business and general aviation both by easing restrictions and by improving airport and airfield infrastructure. Charlie Mularski, chair of the Asian Business Aviation Association (AsBAA), has cautioned that this will not necessarily benefit business aviation because the hundreds of planned new runways will be too short to accommodate corporate jets.

The Chinese authorities have also however announced plans to build 154 new secondary commercial airports over the next ten years, with an additional 40 due for completion by 2020. Major airports, particularly Beijing Capital and Shanghai’s airports are experiencing capacity issues and slot restrictions due to increasing demand from the country’s burgeoning commercial airlines.

Business and general aviation are seen as locomotives for economic growth – a theme emphasised by Jiang Huaiyu director general of the Eastern Regional Headquarters for the Civil Aviation Authority of China (CAAC) in his comments to the ABACE opening session. The Chinese market is indeed changing. This year’s 33-strong aircraft static display is evidence of that – featuring marques of different sizes and designed for very different roles, rather than the large cabin aircraft that seemed to dominate five years ago.

HondaJet makes ABACE debut

HondaJet grabbed the headlines at ABACE by making its debut appearance in China. Although manufacturer Honda Aircraft has yet to initialise the process of applying to certificate the HondaJet with Chinese regulator CAAC, its appearance at ABACE targeted what it views as a substantial potential local market for the light jet. By the end of March 2017 the company had delivered some 37 aircraft after securing FAA certification in December 2015 and EASA in May 2016. After ABACE, the HondaJet continued its demonstration tour with stops in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The HondaJet can seat up to six passengers with a single pilot.

The Asia Pacific bizjet fleet in numbers

Hong Kong-based aviation consultancy Asian Sky Group released its latest annual fleet report during ABACE in Shanghai. The total regional business jet fleet stood at some 1,155 aircraft, a net increase of 3% over 2015. Growth however is slowing noticeably. The increase of 34 aircraft in 2016 compares with a net uplift of 58 the previous year. A total of 112 airframes were added during 2016 (55 pre-owned and 57 new aircraft) but 78 also left the region.

China retains the largest fleet – with a total of 313 business jets although this figure has grown by a modest 4% compared to 2015. The Chinese fleet grew by 13 aircraft over the 12 months. When “Greater China” is considered – including China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan – the fleet of 477 aircraft represents some 41% of the Asia-Pacific total.

Hongkong Jet receives Guernsey AOC

2-REG, the Channel Islands Aircraft Registry, has granted an AOC (Air Operator Certificate) to Business Aircraft Services (BAS) Guernsey, a recently established subsidiary of specialist operator Hongkong Jet, which is itself part of China’s Deer Jet Group. The first aircraft on the AOC is a 40-seat VIP BBJ787-8, which was registered 2-DEER at EBACE 2016 and stole many show headlines. The Dreamliner is now available for worldwide charter, having previously been restricted to private operation. Hongkong Jet is keen to target markets outside Asia and this expansion into Europe is part of this strategy. It is understood that BAS plans to add another four aircraft to the Guernsey AOC by year-end.

Japan Airlines ties up with Dassault

Japan Air Lines (JAL) has linked up with Le Bourget-based Dassault Falcon Service (DFS), a subsidiary of French manufacturer Dassault, to connect clients arriving in Paris Charles de Gaulle (CDG) with destinations throughout Europe and the Middle East using corporate jets. From 1 May, JAL Falcon Business Jet Service will use a fleet of nine Falcon aircraft, which will be operated by DFS from the French capital’s corporate aviation hub airport. Fare costs will vary depending on the aircraft used and distance travelled. Ground transport will be provided between CDG and Le Bourget. JAL President Yoshiharu Ueki said: “We see business jets as a way to multiply travel options for our customers without having to expand our route network.”

RANA SERVICE CENTRE: Ownership structures

Leveraging the Sovereign Group’s wealth of experience in the provision of corporate services, RANA offers ownership solutions that are tailored specifically to aviation assets. We can recommend appropriate jurisdictions and corporate structures for asset protection, including tax and succession planning, as well as advising on the requirements and restrictions of particular registries. The correct use of a company structure – or special purpose vehicle (SPV) – can offer a number of distinct advantages to the owner of private aircraft or other types of aviation asset. Access to corporate limited liability and enhanced levels of confidentiality are the most obvious, but a company structure can also provide significant potential benefits in respect of inheritance tax and succession planning, as well as simplifying any future sale of the asset, resulting in savings of time and cost. Sovereign can establish structures in jurisdictions worldwide that are best suited to the owner’s place of residence, domicile, the aircraft’s registration and intended usage.

Dassault to launch new Falcon this year?

French manufacturer Dassault Aviation announced that it plans “to be in a position to launch a new Falcon jet at the end of 2017”, according to the introduction in the manufacturer’s latest annual report by chairman and CEO Eric Trappier. The report confirmed “preliminary studies are focusing on enhanced comfort and a reduced environmental footprint, mainly by reducing fuel consumption and noise.” The report prompts questions on the possible design – the most crucial being whether it would offer two or three engines. It is anticipated that the aircraft will be designated as the Falcon 9X at launch. The company’s new twin engine Falcon 5X is expected to fly for the first time later this year and is set to enter service in 2020.

Trump causes problems for PBI

US President Donald Trump’s frequent visits to his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida have been causing problems for general and corporate aircraft operators using Palm Beach International Airport (PBI). Mar-a-Lago is less than 4km from PBI and is under the approach to the airport’s runway 28R. Whenever the President is in residence, a Traffic Flow Management (TFR) is in place limiting access to the airspace below a certain altitude and requiring pre-clearance gateway screening for traffic intending to arrive or depart from PBI. It is understood that local operators have been complaining at the impact that the TFR is having on their business and the resulting reduction in traffic.

VistaJet accepts bookings via WeChat

Among the host of industry announcements at ABACE, charter and programme specialist VistaJet confirmed that it is now the first business aviation operator to accept payments made by WeChat. VistaJet’s WeChat sales platform taps into the huge local market of clients using the Chinese message-based communications and payment app. Clients will be able to use WeChat to book and pay for both individual charters and for hours-based programmes.

VistaJet is headquartered in Malta, with further offices in London, New York, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Dubai. Chairman Thomas Flohr said: “Our Chinese consumers don’t tend to use email as a primary communication tool, and instead pointed us to the incredible popularity of WeChat. Launching a WeChat service is a huge opportunity to allow people to talk to our team – anytime, anywhere – and enable us to provide Chinese customers with the best experience in the industry.”

Corporate aircraft news

French manufacturer Daher unveiled an upgraded version of its popular single engine turboprop TBM 900 at the SUN 'n FUN International Fly-In & Expo at Lakeland, Florida, at the beginning of April. The TBM 910 offers an updated Garmin G1000 NXi integrated flight deck. The cabin interior has also been reworked to bring it into line with the TBM 930. The new variant received FAA and EASA certification on 24 March and was displayed at AERO Friedrichshafen, Europe’s largest general aviation event at the end of April.

On 2 May, the FAA granted a production certificate to US manufacturer Cirrus Aircraft, which will enable it to increase output of its Vision SF50 single engine very light jet. The production rate will now be ramped up to one aircraft per week. The company is aiming to produce some 100 aircraft in 2018, with an eventual target of 125 per annum. The company has delivered six aircraft since the design received FAA certification in October last year. It is understood that Cirrus holds orders for some 600 aircraft.

Embraer has confirmed press reports that it plans to eventually transfer production of all mid-size Legacy 450 and 500 aircraft from Brazil to its plant at Melbourne, FL.

Russian aircraft manufacturer Sukhoi has delivered the first EASA-certified Sukhoi Business Jet (SBJ) to Comlux KZ in Kazakhstan, following a year’s interior and engineering outfitting at Comlux Completion in Indianapolis. The 19-seat aircraft will be operated in the interest of copper mining specialist Kazakhmys Corporation and has been re-registered in Kazakhstan as UP-SJ001. It will also be the first SBJ to be made available for VVIP charter. Comlux KZ is to manage the aircraft on behalf of Kazakhmys.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \ \

Cessna Citation M2



CATEGORY

Light jet

MANUFACTURER

Textron Aviation, USA

ENGINE

2 x Williams FJ44-1AP-21 turboprops

LENGTH

12.98 m

WINGSPAN

14.40 m

RANGE

2,871 km

MAX. SPEED

748 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

7

NO. OF CREW

1

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

4,853 kg

DESCRIPTION

According to manufacturer Textron Aviation, the Cessna Citation M2 “is the ultimate combination of beauty and efficiency.” The marketing material goes on to note that “the M2 is the entry level jet that pilots have been asking for.” The M2 was first announced in September 2011 and the prototype first flew six months later. The first production model then flew in August 2013 with FAA certification following in December of that year.

The M2 is based upon the CJ1+, production of which ceased in 2011. The new variant offers new improved Williams powerplant providing a notable increase in thrust at both cruise and operation from hot-and-high fields. The M2 also offers the Garmin G3000 avionics replacing the Rockwell Collins Pro Line 21. With a remodelled interior common to other CJ models, the design also sports distinctive winglets. The aircraft is designed to operate from runways as short as 978m (3,210ft) and to allow versatility of operation.