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January 2020

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The Maltese aircraft register - ten years on

Ten years ago the government of Malta relaunched its existing small scale aircraft register with the stated aim of seizing a “timely opportunity” afforded by substantial growth in aviation. At the start of 2020 it is clear that the Maltese register has enjoyed considerable success. In terms of airlines, a number of existing EU companies including Ryanair, Air Nostrum, Blue Panorama and Hi-Fly have established Maltese entities and have registered aircraft in Malta citing lower costs and potential tax savings.

Before the relaunch, the Maltese authorities had established a steering committee “to establish a successful Aviation Register directed to attract international airlines and other companies in this industry and to serve as an important milestone in building an aviation service cluster in Malta.” The promotional brochure set out forecasts for a new register, looked at the competition and concluded that there were considerable opportunities for the Maltese economy.

One of the stated aims of the register was to encourage commercial rather than private operators of bizjets to relocate to Malta. Our analysis of the register over the years show the island’s clear success. In April 2010, there were 83 aircraft on the register, of which 14 were corporate jets. In the latest data published this month, the register boasts 391 aircraft of which 193 are bizjets. Malta has attracted major players – 58 of the 193 aircraft are operated by programme specialist VistaJet, 13 by Luxwing, and a further ten by both VIP charter operator Comlux and TAG Aviation Malta.

FAA issues guidance against illegal charters

Just before Christmas, the US FAA underscored its commitment to fighting illegal charters by issuing several new guidance documents aimed at charter brokers, operators and passengers. The documents provide a number of ‘red flag’ warnings that may indicate that there are questions over a company’s legitimacy to operate a charter flight. These include failure to charge Federal Excise Tax, the absence of a safety card or safety briefing on the aircraft, if the price seems ‘too good to be true’ and if the crew prompt passengers on what to say in the event of an FAA inspection.

The bottom line, as laid out in the guidance documents, is that “Illegal air charter operations pose a serious safety hazard to the travelling public, and the FAA works aggressively to identify and shut down rogue operators. Today, booking a charter flight can be as easy as tapping a few buttons on your mobile device. But that doesn’t mean the flight is legal or safe.”

ADS-B Out equipage - the deadline

The FAA deadline for US-registered turbine aircraft to be equipped with ADS-B Out passed on 1 January 2020. According to the latest published data from FlightAware, 88% of business and general aviation aircraft had received the necessary modification by the end of November – a modest 3% increase over the figure for October. Of the 12%, or 2,099 aircraft, not yet equipped, a large proportion are older generation business jets – including the Dassault Falcon 20, Cessna Citation III, IAI Astra and Learjet 55. In addition, a significant number of turboprop utility aircraft – particularly the Quest Kodiak and Air Tractor AT-802 – remain to be modified. The FAA has made it clear that the deadline is non-negotiable and that aircraft will need to receive the ADS-B if operating in airspace that requires a transponder.

Delta Air Lines invests in Wheels Up

In a move that will create one of the world’s largest fleets of managed fleets of private aircraft, Wheels Up has purchased Delta Private Jets – the charter/management subsidiary of Delta Air Lines. As part of the deal, the airline will become the largest investor in Wheels Up. Once the deal is finalised the expanded Wheels Up will boast a fleet of over 190 jets and turboprop twins and a base of over 8,000 members and customers. Delta CEO Ed Bastian commented that “This ground-breaking partnership will democratize private aviation, making the convenience of private jet travel accessible to more consumers. Wheels Up’s lifestyle experiences and innovative digital platform, combined with the scale and service of Delta Private Jets, helps further Delta’s mission of connecting people and communities worldwide through travel.” Wheels Up founder and CEO Kenny Dichter will continue at the helm.

NetJets launches security subsidiary

NetJets has launched a new subsidiary with QS Security Services, a global network of security specialists with proven expertise in personal protection. The new service will offer NetJets customers access to an international network of safety experts that are available 24/7 to provide various levels of security services, such as secure ground transportation, close-protection agents and medically trained personnel. Jack VanderStoep, Vice President of Global Security at NetJets, will lead QS Security Services.

AVIATION SERVICES HUB:

Aviation insurance

Sovereign Insurance Services (SIS) is a fully licensed, independent general insurance intermediary, based in Gibraltar. The strength of the Sovereign brand combined with the expertise and experience of the SIS team has enabled it to build relationships with leading insurers throughout the world. With direct links to specialist underwriters based in London and elsewhere, SIS can provide wide-ranging bespoke insurance cover for owners of fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. The team further offers market insight, expertise and competitive pricing, together with efficient and professional claims’ handling.

Specialist aviation insurance covers the full range – from public liability through to hull insurance for new or used airframes. The SIS team will quote on all types of aviation asset – from corporate jets and turboprops, general aviation aircraft and helicopters to FBOs, flying schools or commercial passenger or freight operators. SIS also specialises in areas such as kidnap and ransom insurance, which may be of interest to aircraft owners and operators

Bizjets in the spotlight as Carlos Ghosn escapes

In a story that has gripped the world's media and produced a multitude of lurid headlines, the escape from Japan of former Nissan CEO Carlos Ghosn was allegedly made possible by employees of a Turkish bizjet charter operator. One of the company's Global Express aircraft (registered TC-TSR) is reported to have flown Ghosn from Osaka Kansai to Istanbul, where he was transferred to sistership Challenger 300 (TC-RZA) to fly onwards to Beirut. A number of pilots and other employees of a handling company have been arrested by the Turkish authorities investigating the use of the jets and fraudulent documentation.

Used bizjet market busy at year end

According to data published by US aircraft brokerage Mente Group, the used bizjet market saw an upsurge in activity as 2019 drew to a close. Mente CEO Brian Proctor said: "With more aircraft on the market recently, buyers and sellers are seeking to make deals before the end of the year to hedge against the economic, political and tax uncertainties that 2020 might bring." He also noted that the market is now more balanced because there are an equal number of buyers and sellers looking to make deals.

European traffic down in 2019

According to the end of year data produced by data analyst WingX Advance, European business aviation traffic fell by 1.6% overall in 2019 compared to the previous year. On a slightly more positive note, traffic for the month of December rose by 2.9% but this followed November's figure which had recorded a 3.2% fall. For the year, two markets were clearly weak, with traffic down significantly in both the UK and Germany. WingX managing director Richard Koe said: "Long-term trends in all business jet segments are heading south following the brief rally in 2017 to 2018. Particularly on the older platform aircraft, in the lighter and entry-level category, owners are flying much less. The sensitivity of business jets to the climate agenda may well exaggerate this trend next year."

Corporate aircraft news

Bombardier's Global 5500 and 6500 have now received certification from the FAA. This follows approval from Transport Canada and European regulator EASA. The new Globals were first unveiled at EBACE 2018 and are enhanced versions of the popular Global 5000 and 6000 equipped with the Rolls-Royce Pearl 15 engines.

The Canadian OEM underscored its commitment to the use of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) by delivering its first new aircraft from the factory fuelled using SAF. The Challenger 350 was delivered to a client in San Diego from Montreal and was fuelled entirely by SAF after the manufacturer received a consignment of the fuel in November.

On the same theme, Gulfstream Aerospace announced on 17 December that its fleet has flown more than one million nautical miles (1,852,000km) on SAF. The renewable fuel has been used on its own corporate flights and has also serviced its demonstration flights and aircraft undergoing flight testing. The fuel used comprises a mix of 70% jet-A and 30% low carbon SAF made from agricultural waste. The increasing use of SAF underlines the OEM's commitment to reduce CO² emissions.

Gulfstream's G550 first received FAA certification on 14 August 2003. The Savannah-based manufacturer confirmed that it has now delivered the 600th example of the long range, large cabin twinjet. Gulfstream president Mark Burns said: "The G550 has solidified its place as one of the most dependable business jets available. More than 20% of Gulfstream aircraft in service are 550s, proving its reputation as an established and versatile aircraft for business aviation."

Aerion Supersonic, the designer of the AS2 supersonic business jet, continues to collect design and manufacture partners to work on the project. Joining Boeing, Honeywell, GE Aviation and Spirit Aerosystems are GKN Aerospace and Aemnova. GKN will design the electrical wiring and interconnection systems along with the empennage, while Aemnova will design and develop the mid fuselage of the aircraft. The AS2 is due to commence flight testing in 2024.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

Eurocopter AS350 Écureuil



CATEGORY

Helicopter

MANUFACTURER

Eurocopter (now Airbus Helicopters), France

ENGINE

1 x Turbomeca Arriel 2B turboshaft

LENGTH

10.93 m

ROTOR DIAMETER

10.70 m

RANGE

632 km

MAX. SPEED

287 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

5

NO. OF CREW

1

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

2,250 kg

DESCRIPTION

The AS350 Écureuil (Squirrel) was originally designed in the early 1970s with the first customer deliveries being made in 1978. The aircraft, powered by Avro Lycoming LTS-101 was known as the AS350C AStar in the North American market, while the Turbomeca Arriel powered version was marketed as the AS350B Écureuil in the rest of the world. The AS350B received French certification in October 1977 while the AS350C gained FAA approval two months later. In 2016 the Eurocopter brand was dropped in favour of Airbus Helicopters and the AS350 is now known as the H125.

Since the 1970s the basic single engine design has undergone a succession of upgrades to avionics, powerplant and rotors. The AS350 has served in a number of roles including use as a small executive transport. Until 2013 the aircraft were manufactured at the Eurocopter plant in Bordeaux. In a move to disperse production the company began assembly of the AS350 at its plant in Columbus, Mississippi, to concentrate on the lucrative US market.