

Europe must prepare for post-Covid bizav operations

The European Business Aviation Association (EBAA) has made a clear and urgent call to the governments of the EU member states, the UK and Switzerland, as well as regulators and other interested groups that they need to work together to develop a series of harmonised rules that will enable the safe reopening of air travel after the Covid pandemic.

As part of this call, the EBAA has issued a number of suggested guidelines to allow for a timely and safe restart of operations. These include: rapid testing for Covid-19; a cogent coordination of travel restrictions; vaccination to allow travel; the elimination of restrictions for bizav crews; and a proposal to prioritise vaccinations for those operating medical or emergency flights.

Pointing to bizav's adaptable, tailored and secure operations, EBAA Secretary General Athar Husain Khan said: "Operators can offer specific precautionary measures and guarantees that ensure the highest level of safety. Additional safety measures have been developed and implemented in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. As such, business aviation can and will be one of the first movers once it is safe to lift all travel restrictions. When families want to reunite, when companies need to transport workers once again, business aviation operators will be able to help, quickly and safely."

The top 10 best-selling bizjets of 2020

New bizjet sales fell to 644 aircraft overall in 2020, a fall of 20% from 2019, a drop directly attributable to the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic. According to data published by the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA), the top ten best-sellers were:

Position	Aircraft	Number	Position	Aircraft	Number
1	Gulfstream 500-650 (all models)	105	6	Pilatus PC-24	41
2	Cirrus SF50 Vision	73	7	Dassault Falcon (all models)	34
3	Bombardier Global (all models)	59	8	HondaJet	31
4	Embraer Phenom 300/300E	50	9	Cessna Citation Latitude	26
5	Bombardier Challenger (all models)	44	10	Cessna Citation M2	24

Aerion plans a second supersonic jet

US manufacturer Aerion Supersonic has confirmed that it remains on track to begin production of its Mach 1.5 (1,838kmh) AS2 supersonic business jet in 2023. It has also confirmed initial plans for the AS3 – a commercial aircraft with seating capacity for up to 50 passengers, a range of 12,964km (7,000nm) and a speed in excess of Mach 4 (4,900kmh). The company provided these initial plans and confirmed that it expects to provide further details of the project later this year. It is understood that the AS3 will be developed on the back of the AS2 project and it is anticipated that it will fly before the end of this decade. Speaking last year, Aerion chairman, president and CEO Tom Vice said: "At Aerion, our vision is to build a future where humanity can travel between any two points on our planet within three hours. Supersonic flight is the starting point, but it is just that – the beginning. To truly revolutionise global mobility as we know it today, we must push the boundaries of what is possible."

European bizav traffic yet to rebound

Bizav traffic in Europe continues to reflect a huge reduction due to the Covid-19 and there are only limited signs that this will rebound, according to the latest data produced by specialist analyst WingX Advance. Bizav flights in Europe over the Easter weekend were down by some 40% over the same period two years ago. Some countries are worse hit than others and are also slowing any expectation of significant rebound. European traffic is running at 10% below 2020 levels overall. The UK, in particular, reports traffic levels 55% down on the low point at the beginning of the pandemic last year. Both French and German traffic levels are down more than 10% over 2020 levels. There are positive signs however, as traffic levels in Greece, Spain, Italy and Turkey are all in positive territory.

WingX CEO Richard Koe noted that "...the European market is sluggish, with the UK's inactivity suggesting that regional recovery in traffic demand will not automatically result from successful vaccination programmes."

Globally, business aviation traffic is up by 5% since the beginning of 2021 over the same period last year, whilst commercial airline traffic remains at 39% down over 2020 levels. Bizav traffic is driving the recovery in North America with business jet hours up by 15% YOY. In the latest figures, 6,100 sectors were flown last week in North America, compared to just 1,000 in Europe.

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Vista Global expands its US operation and VistaJet fleet

Dubai-headquartered private aviation group Vista Global has agreed to acquire Apollo Jets, the certified broker based in New York, as further evidence of what Vista founder and chairman Thomas Flohr sees as inevitable industry consolidation. With the acquisition, Vista Global expects its operations in the US to grow by more than 20% as Apollo Jets will be integrated with XO, Vista Global's digital brand. Apollo's 4,000 clients will now have access to a full management service through Talon Air and access to the VistaJet fleet of aircraft.

VistaJet, the specialist programme operator, headquartered in Malta has been confirmed as the previously unidentified customer behind a 2020 order for 10 Bombardier Challenger 350 twinjets. It is expected that the aircraft will be delivered in 2022 and join the 13 examples currently in use. The carrier has also taken delivery of two Global 7500 aircraft (registered 9H-VIB and 9H-VIC), part of an order for up to 12 examples.

Preparing for in-person NBAA-BACE

The NBAA has confirmed that plans are on track to hold the first 'in person' event since the beginning of the pandemic given the increasing success of the US domestic vaccination programme and with a commitment to clear safety procedures for the show. The world's largest corporate aviation event, NBAA-BACE will be held in Las Vegas from 12 to 14 October and will, for the first time, be held in a single exhibition space – the newly constructed West Hall convention centre. As with previous shows, the static display will be hosted at Henderson Executive Airport, some 21km outside the city.

Corporate aircraft news

US manufacturer Textron Aviation, which announced an upgrade to the Beechcraft King Air 200 last December, confirmed that the King Air 260 has now received FAA certification, allowing for initial customer deliveries. The 260 features increased range, a higher top speed, an improved auto-throttle, newly designed seats and a multi-scan weather radar. It follows shortly after recent upgrades to the King Air 350, with the resulting 360 receiving regulatory approval in October 2020.

On 31 March, Textron confirmed that it had delivered the 1,000th example of its Citation 560XL series twinjet. The 560XL family includes the Excel, XLS and XLS+. The 560XL received FAA certification in April 1998 and has since racked up more than five million flight hours. To put the type's success into perspective, Textron's senior vice-president of global sales and flight operations Lannie O'Bannion said: "Every two minutes, a 560XL jet takes off or lands somewhere in the world."

Adding to the celebratory mood in Wichita, Textron also marked the delivery of the 600th example of the CitationJet 525B CJ3/CJ3+ just a week later. The CJ3 received FAA certification in 2004, with the upgraded CJ3+ also receiving the nod ten years later. The CJ3+ twinjet can seat up to nine passengers.

At the end of March, Canada's Bombardier also had reason to celebrate after the delivery of the 50th example of its flagship Global 7500 twinjet. The aircraft received approval from Transport Canada on 28 September 2018, with FAA certification following two months later. Global 7500s have so far been registered in Malta, Canada, the US, Germany, France, the UK, Switzerland, the Isle of Man, Austria, Brazil, San Marino, Australia, Bermuda and the Cayman Islands.

Not to be outdone, Gulfstream Aerospace confirmed that it delivered the 100th example of an aircraft in the new generation G500/G600 twinjet family. The aircraft in question was the G500, which first entered service in September 2018. The initial delivery of the longer range G600 followed in August 2019.

Boeing Business Jets has confirmed the sale of the last VVIP version of the Boeing 747, having already announced that the production line of the iconic 747 will end next year. The final airframe, a 747-8i, will join nine other examples currently in VVIP service with the governments of Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Morocco and Turkey.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

Boeing 727-200(Adv)



CATEGORY

Heavy jet

MANUFACTURER

Boeing, USA

ENGINE

3 x P&W JT8D-9/15/17/17R turbofans

LENGTH

46.68 m

WINGSPAN

32.92m

RANGE

4,720 km

MAX. SPEED

961 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

189 in airline service

NO. OF CREW

3

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

95,100 kg

DESCRIPTION

The iconic Boeing 727 trijet made its first flight (in its original -100 version) on 9 February 1963 and entered service with US carrier Eastern Airlines in February 1964. A stretched version (the -200) first flew three years later and a total of 310 examples were produced before the -200 Advanced was introduced. The -200(Adv) became the most popular version, with some 935 examples delivered.

The 727-200(Adv) was introduced in 1970 and entered service in 1972. The enhanced design featured more powerful engines, an increased maximum takeoff weight (MTOW), greater fuel capacity and range which was uplifted by some 32%. A freighter version of the -200(Adv) was introduced in 1981. Production of the 727 airliner ceased in September 1984 with a total of 1,832 examples delivered to customers around the world. In 2021, a very small number of 727s remain in service, mostly in pure freight mode, although several examples serve as corporate transports, mainly in the US.