


AIRBORNE

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WEF 2019 - government aircraft thin on the ground

The absence of so many heads of state due to domestic issues contributed to a marked reduction in government aircraft seen on the ground in Zurich for the annual general meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF), the gathering of top political, business and other leaders in the Swiss mountain resort of Davos.

High profile absentees from the four-day conference included: US President Trump who skipped Davos to deal with the partial government shutdown; UK Prime Minister May who stayed in London to patch up her Brexit deal; French President Macron who said 'non' to avoid further angering yellow-vest protesters; India's Prime Minister Modi who busy preparing for a tough general election; and Canada's President Trudeau who was grounded after criticism of his expenditure at Davos 2018

According to global charter specialist Air Charter Service (ACS), the closest airports for Davos – Zurich, Dübendorf, St Gallen-Altenrhein, Samedan/St Moritz and Friedrichshafen – were expected to see almost 1,500 additional business aircraft movements in connection with the WEF. RANA Director Brian T Richards, a veteran photographer of WEF traffic in Zurich, reported that the trend for aircraft to drop their passengers and then relocate for parking was even more apparent this year.

Observers of this year's traffic also noted that the most favoured rides were large cabin aircraft with numerous examples of the Gulfstream G650/G650ER, Global Express and Falcon 7X/8X in evidence.

US government shutdown - the fallout

Stretching over 35 days from 22 December to 25 January, the partial shutdown of the US government was the longest on record. The impasse, which sprung from the battle over funding President Trump's much-touted Mexican border wall, had a major impact on aviation and the day-to-day working of the Federal Aviation Administration. The process for granting Certificates of Airworthiness was delayed, impacting several OEMs including Gulfstream. While most aircraft transactions were able to complete, some had issues involving ownership and registration under non-citizen owner trust structures. In addition, the National Transportation Safety Board was forced to suspend active investigation of some 1,900 – mainly general – aviation accidents. The National Business Aviation Association will continue to monitor the impact of the shutdown and to lobby for exemption should the shutdown recur.

Dassault Aviation acquires Luxaviation's ExecuJet MROs

In another example of manufacturers' focus on in-service support provision, France's Dassault Aviation announced that it is acquiring the MRO (maintenance, repair and overhaul) facilities of Luxaviation's ExecuJet subsidiary. Following regulatory approval, ExecuJet's network of 15 MRO facilities in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Latin America will be fully integrated into Dassault's aftermarket support structure. Swiss-headquartered Luxaviation acquired ExecuJet in 2015. The FBO and aircraft management arms are not included in the sale. Dassault Aviation chairman and CEO Eric Trappier said: "With ExecuJet, we will continue the development of our high-quality customer support network, while growing our Falcon maintenance market share."

European bizav falls flying falls slightly in January

European business aviation flight activity fell by 0.8% YOY in January according to the latest data published by Hamburg-based analyst WingX Advance. Overall business jet departures were down by some 2.1% after recording a small increase in December. WingX Business Aviation Monitor recorded 54,481 bizav departures over the course of the month. In terms of overall activity on a rolling year basis, the total shows a modest increase of 1.4% – up 10% over 2016.

VistaJet sets records at 15

Malta-headquartered VistaJet, the global business aviation company founded by Thomas Flohr in 2004, posted record results in 2018. The overall number of VistaJet flights increased by 25% and it added a 31% increase in new programme members. By region, Europe accounted for 48% of VistaJet flights in 2018 with new members up by 105%. The UK is a major powerhouse for programme clients, whose number doubled. VistaJet is looking for further growth in 2019 and is eyeing both the Middle East and USA as key markets for expansion. As the company turns 15, it is also one of the top five European 'unicorn companies' – a privately held start-up company valued at over \$1 billion – by funding.

AVIATION SERVICES HUB: RegisterAnAircraft

This month's note offers a timely reminder of what RegisterAnAircraft (RANA) can do. As the aviation division of Sovereign, our services are primarily tailored to private or corporate clients with business jets, turboprops or helicopters. We can also assist commercial passenger and freight operators as well as general aviation entities and flyers.

It is a stark admission but the RANA brand clearly does not describe everything we can do for aviation clients – we don't just register aircraft although we are happy to do so in a number of jurisdictions. Sovereign's key area of expertise and experience is setting up corporate structures to hold assets. Unusually for specialist corporate service providers, Sovereign also boasts its own in-house insurance broker. Gibraltar-based Sovereign Insurance Services (SIS) can source coverage for the whole spectrum of risk – from aircraft and engines to crew and passengers. RANA has well-established links with banks, consortia and brokers to arrange finance solutions for aviation transactions. Finally, we can assist in the process of leading to informed decisions. Tailored consultancy and aviation photography complete the suite of services.

Press questions over Sala flight

Amid a mass of press speculation following the crash of Piper Malibu N264DB carrying Cardiff City footballer Emiliano Sala and pilot David Ibbotson on 21 January, some media organisations have used the tragedy to focus on aircraft ownership and the nature of the flight. A lengthy article on the BBC news website, headlined "The obscure world of plane ownership is under the spotlight" chose to question the completely lawful non-citizen owner trust structure that allows non-US owners to register an aircraft with the FAA while retaining the confidentiality of the beneficial owner. Satirical magazine Private Eye also used the flight as a springboard for a discussion on what it describes as "the murky world of grey charters" although there is no evidence to suggest at this stage that this was a commercial charter.

2019 used Gulfstream market likely to be 'choppy'

US business aircraft brokerage Hagerty Jet Group issued a market report that predicts a 'choppy' pre-owned business jet market in 2019. Hagerty, which specialises in Gulfstream transactions, notes that "demand for aircraft less than five years old will remain strong, but older aircraft will continue to decline in value, although at a slower pace than in 2017". The report points to global political uncertainty, volatility in equity markets and other challenges such as the looming ADSB-Out deadline due on 1 January 2020. Hagerty predicts that continued market instability might have the effect of increasing reluctance for buyers to complete deals, which will in turn grow the used inventory. On a more positive note, the report identifies just 3.2% of the 342 in-service G650 and G650ER as being available for sale.

Manufacturer delivery numbers 2018

Dassault Aviation recorded 42 orders for Falcon business jets in 2018 – up from 38 in 2017. Although deliveries fell from 49 to 41 aircraft, the French manufacturer noted that this tally was in line with its predictions.

Brazil's Embraer Executive Jets saw deliveries fall by more than 16% to just 91 aircraft in 2018, compared to 109 the year before. This total fell short of its target by more than 10%.

US manufacturer Textron Aviation delivered 188 business jets in 2018, an increase of eight over 2017. It was also a bumper year for turboprops, with 186 deliveries compared to 155 in 2017.

Gulfstream delivered 121 bizjets – an increase of just one over 2017 and fully in line with the prediction of its parent company General Dynamics for 121 to 125 deliveries.

Corporate aircraft news

Bombardier's flagship Global 7500 gained certification from European regulator EASA, exactly three months after receiving approval from the US FAA. The aircraft entered service with a US customer on 20 December and this approval will now permit registration of the aircraft in Europe. The Canadian manufacturer expects to deliver between 15 and 20 examples this year, with that figure set to double in 2020.

Following its first flight in November, Airbus Corporate Jets formally delivered the first ACJ320neo to Farnborough-based Acropolis Aviation on 16 January. The aircraft has now been ferried to Basel-based AMAC Aerospace for cabin outfitting. The ACJ320neo can fly 25 passengers over 11,100km (6,000 nautical miles), which will facilitate operation between Los Angeles and London or Los Angeles and Tokyo.

In a major announcement which took industry observers completely by surprise, Boeing confirmed on 5 February that it is to partner with Aerion Corp. in the development of the AS2 supersonic business jet (SSBJ). The Seattle based giant has also made an as yet undisclosed 'significant' investment in the Reno, Nevada company. Boeing is understood to be taking the place of Lockheed as strategic partner, a deal announced in 2017. Under the terms of this agreement, Boeing now hold two seats on the Aerion board. The AS2 SSBJ remains slated to make its first flight in 2023 using the GE Aviation Affinity engine. Under the agreement, Boeing will provide manufacturing, engineering and flight-testing resources for the SSBJ programme.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

Eurocopter AS532UL Cougar



CATEGORY

Helicopter

MANUFACTURER

Eurocopter (now Airbus Helicopters), France

ENGINE

2 x Turbomeca Makila 1A1 turboshaft

LENGTH

15.53 m

ROTOR DIAMETER

15.60 m

RANGE

537 km

MAX. SPEED

278 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

29 troops

NO. OF CREW

2

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

9,000 kg

DESCRIPTION

Observers of traffic at Zurich airport during the annual general meeting of the WEF in Davos will have seen a host of camouflaged AS532UL Cougar helicopters. Although designed as a multi-role military rotorcraft, the Cougar is used by the Swiss Air Force to ferry visiting world leaders from Zurich airport to Davos, which is high in the Alps. Equipped with skis, these Cougars take just 20 minutes compared to a challenging road journey of more than three hours.

The Cougar was developed from the SA330 Puma in service with air arms worldwide. The AS332 Super Puma first flew in September 1977 and there was a change of designation in 1990. This saw the military version being renamed as the AS532, while the civilian Super Puma retained the AS332 nomenclature. The ten AS532 in service with the Swiss Air Force are the UL version that can carry up to 29 troops and can also lift 4.5 tons by a sling carried beneath the fuselage. Turkey is the largest operator of the Cougar with some 60 examples in service; the French Air Force boasts 36.