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Another round of event cancellations

Organisers have announced that a further slew of events have been cancelled due to restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

On 4 February, the European Business Aviation Association (EBAA) and National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) announced the cancellation of EBACE 2021. Europe's largest corporate aviation event had been scheduled to be held at the Palexpo site adjacent to Geneva International Airport from 18 to 20 May. The joint organisers also confirmed that they plan virtual programming to take place during the original show dates.

Just a day later, the NBAA announced that all in-person events will be cancelled through to 30 June. This will affect ABACE, Asia's largest bizav event, which was due to take place in Shanghai over 13-15 April, and the NBAA Maintenance Conference, which was due to take place in Portland, Oregon, over 11-13 May.

The Helicopter Association International (HAI) has also announced the cancellation of Heli-Expo 2021, which was scheduled to take place in New Orleans over 22-25 March.

On a slightly more positive note, AERO Friedrichshafen, the German general aviation show, has not been cancelled but the dates have been moved back from 21-24 April to 14-17 July.

UK travel restrictions set to further dampen demand

In a bid to stop the domestic spread of new variants of the Covid-19 virus, the UK national government has introduced a ban on arrivals from a list of 33 'high risk' countries – a list which covers most of South America, Southern Africa, Portugal and the UAE. From 15 February, UK residents and Irish nationals arriving from these countries will be required to quarantine for a period of 10 days isolation. This is in addition to the requirement announced on 8 January for all international air travellers to provide proof of a negative Covid test, taken within 72 hours of departure. Industry groups have made it clear that this will further dampen an already struggling sector.

The stark reality in Europe

Air traffic throughout Europe is expected to be approximately 64% down in January 2021 compared to January 2019 and the situation is quickly deteriorating, according to the latest set of Traffic Scenarios issued by EUROCONTROL – the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation – for the period up to June 2021. "It is clear that the months of February and March will be exceptionally low across the network, except for cargo, some business traffic and skeleton schedule services. Even April is expected to perform very poorly with only a limited pick-up for the Easter period. Flights in Europe will probably only be around 25%-30% of normal. It is a complete disaster for European aviation – an industry that's already on its knees," said Director General Eamonn Brennan.

Signature acquisition question settled

Former rival bidders Blackstone Group Inc. and Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) have joined forces to acquire Signature Aviation, the aviation support services company that has the world's largest network of FBOs. The deal, which valued the UK company at some \$4.7 billion, offered a per-share bid of \$5.62, supplants a \$4.6 billion deal from GIP, which had been accepted by the Signature board last month. Institutional interest has increased over the last year as demand for business flying has increased due to the pandemic.

European traffic sliding into 2021

Bizav traffic in Europe began 2021 in a very weak state according to the latest data produced by specialist analyst WingX Advance. Across the continent, a growing number of ever more draconian entry restrictions has further suppressed demand and traffic levels. The overall number of flights was down some 30% compared to January 2020. The UK figures in particular show a sharp decline – with traffic down by 55%, reflective perhaps of a combination of Covid-19 travel restrictions and uncertainty following the end of the Brexit transition period on 31 December. The impact on UK bizav airport hubs is stark – both Luton and Farnborough reported that traffic had fallen by more than 60% in the latest figures.

Not perhaps surprisingly, it is international flights that have been most severely impacted; in fact cross-border flights were down by more than 50% in January. On a more positive note, there were more domestic flights in particular markets – especially in Russia, Turkey, Spain and Italy – while international flights from both Russia and Turkey grew YOY.

WingX MD Richard Koe said: "The last few months' busy pre-owned business jet transactions market suggests that once lockdowns are lifted more widely, there could be pent-up demand from lots of new aircraft owners."

AVIATION SERVICES HUB:

Aircraft registration

It may be a cliché, but there is no 'one-size-fits-all' aircraft registry. A number of new registries have been launched over the last few years and more are in the pipeline despite the uncertainty of Covid-19. Many existing registries have also made changes to their offering. Each is seeking to attract owners and operators of corporate aircraft – a comparatively small but highly lucrative market – with what they consider to be a unique selling point.

The reasons for registering an aircraft outside the owner's home jurisdiction are many and various, and it should always be remembered that what might be an appropriate register for one client may not be suitable for another. All credible registries must be able to be offer outstanding service, cost efficiency, flexibility in terms of acceptance of aircraft and crew standards, as well as providing security, confidentiality and political neutrality. Some may also offer potential tax savings and the benefits of asset protection and limitation of liability through corporate ownership.

Vista Global reports leap in growth

Vista Global, the Dubai-based private aviation group, has reported substantial growth in business for its VistaJet subsidiary. 2020 saw a leap in demand with new membership programme subscriptions overall growing by some 29% over 2019. The strongest growth was seen in Europe, which posted a 45% rise, while North America rose by 25%. The company's on-demand charter service numbers also grew by 15%. These uplifts can be largely attributed to an increase for demand for business aviation in response to the challenges and dangers of Covid-19. The group's online platform, XO, also reported a 300% rise in new memberships and a 6% uplift in flight hours YOY.

Gulfstream and Textron - Q4 deliveries

Two of the major bizjet OEMs have now reported their numbers for Q4.

Gulfstream Aerospace – The Savannah-based manufacturer had a comparatively strong Q4, delivering 40 aircraft (34 large cabin and six mid-size) against 44 in Q4 2019. However deliveries for 2020 were down 15.7% overall over 2019. Phebe Novakovic, chair and CEO of parent General Dynamics, forecast 10 fewer deliveries in 2021 due to the ongoing pandemic and end of production of the G550.

Textron Aviation – The manufacturer of Beechcraft and Cessna said jet aircraft deliveries in Q4 totalled 61 – down 10 from the same period a year earlier. However deliveries of turboprops were slightly higher at 61 over 59.

Bombardier - a 'pure play' business aviation company

With the final completion on 29 January of the sale of Bombardier Transportation to the French rail group Alstom, Bombardier is now a 'pure play' company that specialises in manufacturing and services for the business aviation sector. The sale follows the divestment last year of the CSeries airliner to Airbus and the CRJ family of regional aircraft.

Wheels Up going public

Wheels Up, the US membership plan specialist, announced the acquisition last month of Mountain Aviation and it has now been confirmed that the firm is to be the first private aviation entity to be publicly-traded on the New York Stock Exchange. The move is the result of a merger with special purpose acquisition corporation Aspirational Consumer Lifestyle Corp. Founded by Kenny Dichter in 2013, Wheels Up flew more than 150,000 passengers in 2020. The deal will value Wheels Up at \$2.1 billion.

Corporate aircraft news

Textron Aviation has announced the first substantial upgrade to its Cessna Citation 525C CJ4 twinjet since the design first entered service in 2010. Some 320 aircraft have been delivered to date. The CJ4 Gen2 will focus upgrades on an enhanced cabin including additional seating options, a new cabin management system, increased galley storage space, new ambient lighting and new folding airstairs. The new variant cabin has received certification under the existing CJ4 FAA type certificate and deliveries featuring the enhancements will begin in the next couple of months. The CJ4 can seat up to 10 passengers.

In an unusual competition involving earlier examples of the CJ1, two aircraft took part in a head-to-head fly-off. The 2002-built N44VS, equipped with Tamarack Aerospace Atlas active winglets, flew against the 1997-built N741CC over a route from Portland, Maine, to West Palm Beach, Florida – a distance of 2,079km. The later, winglet-equipped example won convincingly – it flew non-stop in four hours and 36 minutes, while the earlier N741CC took five hours and 37 minutes and had to make a 45-minute en route stop. N44VS also demonstrated 30% enhanced fuel efficiency due to the winglet enhancement.

The Rolls-Royce Pearl 700 engine has been selected to power Gulfstream's new flagship G700. Following tests undertaken at its plant at Dahlewitz in Germany, the manufacturer confirmed that the new powerplant can run on 100% sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) although current SAF certification will only permit up to 50% use. It is estimated that 100% SAF will reduce CO² lifecycle emissions by more than 75% compared to conventional fuel.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

Saab 2000



CATEGORY

Regional airliner

MANUFACTURER

Saab, Sweden

ENGINE

2 x Rolls-Royce AE2100P turboprops

LENGTH

27.28 m

WINGSPAN

24.76 m

RANGE

2,869 km

MAX. SPEED

682 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

58 in airline service

NO. OF CREW

2

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

22,800 kg

DESCRIPTION

When production of the Swedish-built Saab 2000 ceased in 1999, a total of 63 examples had been produced. Designed as an extended development of the popular Saab 340 regional airliner, the 2000 was officially launched in May 1989 and first flew on 26 March 1992. It was more than two years before the aircraft entered commercial service – in September 1994. The largest operator was Swiss regional carrier Crossair, which had 34 examples in service at one stage.

In terms of its commercial appeal, the Saab 2000 was launched at the wrong time, facing direct competition from a new generation of regional jets including the Canadair CRJ and Embraer EMB 135 and 145. After the end of production, a number of aircraft have found homes with smaller regional airlines; Eastern Airways and Loganair in the UK and Penair in the US. A small number have also been converted for the Airborne Early Warning role by the Pakistan Air Force and, by Saab itself, as a corporate aircraft.