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Bizjet flights break all records in 2021

While bizav commentators wax lyrical about the huge order backlogs for OEMs, the challenges of ramping up production, the shortage of pre-owned aircraft and the fact that business aviation has captured a new client cohort, it is the traffic numbers that confirm that this optimism is not misplaced.

The latest data from Hamburg-based specialist analyst WingX shows there were 3.3 million business jet flights worldwide in 2021, a full 7% more than the previous annual record set in 2019 and conclusive evidence that the sector has emerged stronger from the pandemic. The annual figure also hides some startling data.

Traffic levels for December were 23% greater than the same month in 2019, while those for the last few days of the year – from 20 December to 2 January – were a striking 41% higher than the same holiday period in 2019. These figures are even more remarkable when the rapid growth of the Omicron variant is taken into account.

North America saw a rise of some 6% over 2019: a 10% rise in the US was offset by a 24% fall in Canada where enhanced travel restrictions were in place. European traffic overall was up by 6% over 2019, driven largely by strengthening markets in Italy, Spain, Russia and Turkey. The number of flights in France, Germany and UK remained below 2019 levels. The rest of the world saw traffic levels increase by some 28% overall, compared to 2019.

Preowned prices to continue ascent

Prices of preowned aircraft will continue to rise in the first half of 2022, according to the results of a survey published by Moscow-based bizjet sales specialist ArcosJet that covered fleet operators, brokers and dealers, FBOs and financing institutions. At the same time, a similar 60% of the respondents believed that preowned inventory would start growing in the second half of 2022.

US 5G rollout rings alarm bells

On 4 January, the US government announced a two-week delay to the nationwide rollout of 5G telephony by telecoms giants AT&T and Verizon due to concerns over the potential impact of 5G signals in the C-Band on critical aviation technologies, particularly interference to radio altimeters. Three days later, the FAA issued a list of 50 airports that will have 5G frequency buffer zones for six months to help prevent flight disruptions.

Safety regulators picked airports based on location, traffic volume and the likelihood of low visibility — all factors that may increase cancellations, delays and diversions. Notably busy airports like Chicago O'Hare, LaGuardia, Orlando International, Los Angeles International and Dallas Fort Worth International are included on the list, along with airports in locations that are often impacted by foggy conditions, such as Seattle/Tacoma International and San Francisco International.

The new 5G services are now set to be activated on 19 January. The NBAA has been at the forefront of industry calls for a clear understanding of the potential problems. President and CEO Ed Bolen said: "We need answers to key questions in order to ensure the world's largest, safest and most efficient aviation system, and we will utilise this time to gather and share much-needed information about this development for all aviation segments, including business aviation."

UK consults on cost sharing flight rules

The UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) launched a consultation in December on proposed changes to the current rules on cost-sharing flights as the issue of illegal or 'grey' charters continues to concern regulators worldwide. Welcoming the review, the Air Charter Association (ACA) said it supported legitimate cost-sharing flights as a valuable tool for pilots to gain experience but had "serious concerns" that they were being used to mask illegal charters. The cost-share element of these flights relates to direct-cost expenses – including fuel, airfield charges or aircraft rental fees – that can legitimately be distributed between the pilot and others onboard the aircraft. ACA encouraged all its members, and the wider industry, to submit their views to the CAA.

Upbeat estimate for 2021 deliveries

The final tally for new bizjet deliveries last year is expected to be 'just shy' of 700 – an 11% increase over 2020 – according to the iQ Pulse newsletter published by specialist analyst JetNet. The forecast also looks at the prospects for OEM performance in 2022 as a result of increased demand caused by customers looking to business aircraft as a result of the pandemic. Since furloughing workers at the beginning of the pandemic, OEMs now face the challenge of returning to full production. JetNet noted: "2021 has been and will continue to be a year to long remember, when orders were well in excess of deliveries, and firm order backlogs were replenished."

AVIATION SERVICES HUB: Aviation consultancy

Accurate, up-to-date and comprehensive information is a key requirement for making the right decisions in respect of assessing requirements, sourcing, owning, registering and operating an aircraft. RANA's specialist aviation consultancy service can draw upon a considerable breadth of knowledge across both the corporate and commercial aviation markets, which is coupled to our established links with authorities, manufacturers, brokers, service providers and operators worldwide.

The spectrum of our expertise is not limited and can move from the bog standard to the more specialised. In a nutshell we can provide technical and performance specifications of competing aircraft models, research and detailed reporting on the operational history of individual airframes and operators both private and commercial; the registration and ownership requirements of registries worldwide; and the most suitable and efficient corporate structures for holding aviation assets.

Event cancellations & postponements

The ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the emergence of the virulent Omicron variant in December have caused the cancellation or postponement of several high-profile events.

ABACE 2022 – The Asian Business Aviation Conference & Exhibition, which was due to be held in Shanghai from 12 to 14 April, has been cancelled for the third year in a row. NBAA President and CEO Ed Bolen said: "As we know, the continued pandemic has prompted governments around the world to institute travel restrictions and requirements, presenting significant logistical and other challenges for exhibitors. We were hopeful we could have held the event, but the health and safety of all ABACE participants is our highest priority."

World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2022 – WEF has announced the deferral of its Annual Meeting in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland, in "light of continued uncertainty over the Omicron outbreak". Originally scheduled to take place from 17 to 21 January, it is now planned for the early summer.

Schedulers & Dispatchers Conference 2022 – The NBAA has postponed SDC2022, which was scheduled for 18 to 21 January in San Diego, CA. It will now take place from 5 to 7 April at the San Diego Convention Centre.

AIROPS 2022 – Originally slated to take place on February 8 and 9 at the Event Lounge in Brussels, the EBAA has rescheduled the annual meeting of FBOs, ground handlers, airports and operators to 7 to 8 April at the same venue.

Piaggio back on the block

The bidding process for the sale of Italian manufacturer Piaggio Aerospace, known for the iconic Avanti twin turboprop, has reopened. Piaggio, which entered extraordinary receivership in late 2018, originally attracted 19 expressions of interest for the acquisition of the corporate assets of Piaggio Aero Industries and Piaggio Aviation. Exclusive negotiations were opened last year with a single potential buyer, but no binding offer was ever submitted.

Corporate aircraft news

Honda Aircraft announced that it had delivered the 200th example of the HondaJet on 16 December, a milestone that came six years after the first delivery of the twin jet in December 2015. An enhanced version of the original, the HondaJet Elite, was introduced in May 2018. The HondaJet has now received regulatory certification in 13 countries worldwide and, in a sign of its continued popularity, the manufacturer received an order for 15 aircraft at the beginning of January from US fractional specialist Volato, which launched last year and currently operates five HondaJets.

The first Airbus Corporate Jets ACJ TwoTwenty made its first flight from Montreal Mirabel airport on 14 December. The project, based on the Airbus A220-100 (formerly Bombardier C Series) airliner, will see this corporate/VVIP version enter service in 2023. Airbus Corporate Jets is promoting the aircraft as "a new value proposition to business aviation buyers" looking for an alternative to the smaller ultra-long range business jets that have a similar price tag. Just over three weeks after the first flight, the initial aircraft was delivered to launch customer Comlux Aviation for VIP completion at its plant in Indianapolis. The aircraft is scheduled for final delivery in December.

Gulfstream Aerospace has been flight testing both its G500 and G600 twinjets in advance of steep approach certification by the FAA and EASA, which is expected in 2023. Examples of the two aircraft have undertaken test approaches to London City Airport and Lugano Airport in the Swiss Alps. On their return, the two aircraft both set city-pair speed records – the G500 from London City to Teterboro Airport, NJ, and the G600 from London City to Seattle, WA.

At the start of December, US aerospace manufacturer Pratt & Whitney received Transport Canada certification for the new PW812D turboprop, which is due to power the new Falcon 6X twin jet of Dassault Aviation. To date, the three test aircraft have accumulated more than 500 flight hours and 150 flights. This programme recently included the first of two 'cold soak' trials in challenging operating conditions in Iqaluit in Northern Canada. The Falcon 6X is expected to enter service by the end of this year.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

DHC-6-300 Twin Otter



CATEGORY

Turboprop

MANUFACTURER

de Havilland, Canada

ENGINE

2 x P&WC PT6A-27 turboprop

LENGTH

15.77 m

WINGSPAN

19.81 m

RANGE

1,427 km

MAX. SPEED

338 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

20

NO. OF CREW

1-2

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

5,670 kg

DESCRIPTION

The DHC-6 Twin Otter has a long pedigree. The project was begun by de Havilland Canada in 1964 and the initial version (the -100) made its first flight in May 1965. The DHC-6 was designed to replace the single engined DHC-3 Otter, which had itself entered service in 1953. Production of the aircraft by de Havilland Canada continued until 1988. Production was then restarted in 2008 by Canadian OEM Viking Aircraft, which had bought the design and type certificate for all out-of-production de Havilland Canada aircraft. The Viking Air DHC-6-400 remains in service today.

The Twin Otter is a very versatile design making much use of STOL capabilities, coupled with a high rate of climb. It has proved very popular in several roles, including commuter airliner, medevac and light cargo transport. It has also proved popular with air arms as a military parachute trainer and with commercial operators as a parachute transport. The aircraft can also be fitted with skis, floats and equipment for rugged operations in remote locations.