

EBACE 2023 - addressing sustainability amid protests

Protecting visitors and the integrity of the show and its exhibits was always going to be a priority at this year's European Business Aviation Convention and Exhibition (EBACE) given recent high-profile protests targeting the business aviation sector worldwide. Organisers EBAA and NBAA had made sustainability the main theme of the show, held in Geneva from 23 to 25 May, but protests by climate activists were predicted.

Although the Swiss authorities had issued a permit for a protest near the entrance of the Palexpo exhibition centre at the end of the show's opening day, the organisers were forced to respond much earlier than planned. At 11.30am protesters breached security and accessed the static aircraft display at Geneva Airport.

Seven protesters wearing safety vests marked 'ban private jets' managed to handcuff themselves to a Gulfstream in the static park. This illegal security breach forced the airport to close for just under an hour, with arriving aircraft having to burn additional fuel while in holding patterns. Greenpeace claimed that up to 100 protesters representing various groups had taken part in the actions.

Both the EBAA and NBAA strongly condemned the protests and the dangers they represented to visitors and exhibitors. They pointed to the fact that the Palexpo centre is powered entirely by renewable energy and all energy use during the show was tracked and carbon offset. In addition, bizav was at the forefront of developing sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and the event's three-day Sustainability Summit had been specifically designed to demonstrate and promote alternative technologies.

The key message from EBACE 2023 is that it should not be remembered for the protests, but for its role in showcasing sustainability and displaying bizav's continued drive for change and commitment to new eco-friendly technology. The static park featured more than 50 aircraft from all the major OEMs and featured debuts by the Gulfstream G800, Airbus ACJ TwoTwenty and the Bombardier Challenger 3500.

Summing up EBACE 2023, NBAA President and CEO Ed Bolen said: "We saw amazing new aircraft announced and debuted ... We had a first-hand look at the fuels, propulsion systems and technologies that will lead to net-zero flight ... EBACE showed us all that is possible today, and how our shared vision will shape tomorrow."

Climate activists spray paint Cessna CitationJet

Exactly two weeks after the opening of EBACE in Geneva, climate activists belonging to the Last Generation group illegally accessed Sylt airport in northern Germany and caused substantial damage to a Cessna Citation CJ1. The group used bolt cutters to access the ramp and then targeted the twinjet, registered in Austria as OE-FMD, apparently at random. The five protesters spray painted the aircraft with orange paint and then glued themselves to it before being arrested and removed. They also unfurled banners that read "Your luxury = our drought" and "Your luxury = our crop failures". In a statement, the group criticised German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for not legislating against private jets.

Bizav traffic's familiar pattern

Bizav traffic in both North America and Europe continues a now well-established pattern. According to the latest data from specialist analyst WINGX Advance which analysed the 500,000 jet and turbo-prop flights which took place in May, traffic has fallen notably since the heady days of 2022 but is still running in excess of pre-pandemic (i.e., 2019) figures.

Traffic in North America for May 2023 ran at 3.5% lower than May 2022 but at a level nearly 12% higher than 2019. Flights by mid-size aircraft recorded the highest fall with levels down some 6.4%. Part 135 (i.e., commercial charter operations) flights fell by 9.5% compared to 2022. In Europe, May saw an overall 8.3% decrease over 2022 levels and analysis predicts that activity will fall by 10% in June. This was however a marked improvement on April where traffic dipped noticeably.

Wheels Up loses CEO and value

Kenny Dichter, who founded US private flight provider Wheels Up in 2013, stepped down as its high-profile CEO on 9 May, although he will retain a seat on the board. According to industry press, the group is "financially challenged" and the evidence to support that assertion is clear. In 2022, the group reported an eye-watering loss of USD555 million on revenues of USD1.58 billion. The value of the group's shares has fallen 94% since it decided to go public in July 2021 after a merger with a special acquisition entity.

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The carefully planned use of a company structure – or special purpose vehicle (SPV) – can provide a number of distinct advantages to the owner of private aircraft or other types of aviation asset. Access to corporate limited liability and enhanced levels of confidentiality are the most obvious, but a company structure can also provide significant potential benefits in respect of estate planning, as well as simplifying any future sale of the asset, resulting in savings of time and cost. Sovereign will establish structures in jurisdictions worldwide that are best suited to the owner's place of residence or domicile and the aircraft's registration and intended usage.

NetJets 'goes large'

On 11 May, fractional specialist operator NetJets placed a huge order with Brazilian OEM Embraer. The Berkshire Hathaway (BH) subsidiary will take up to 250 Praetor 500 mid-size twinjets in a transaction covering the aircraft and "comprehensive services and support" in a deal valued at just under USD5 billion. The Praetor 500, which has a seating capacity of seven to nine passengers, was introduced in 2018 and offers increased range over the Legacy 450 on which it is based. Delivery of the new aircraft is expected to begin in 2025. The order comes as the operator is actively looking to recruit 850 new pilots and as the company has seen its revenues soar in Q1. Although not reported separately, revenues for NetJets and flight simulator trainer FlightSafety International, both part of BH, climbed 18.8% year-on-year.

VistaJet Global-records and questions

Vista Global reported record revenue growth and increase in VistaJet subscription hours sold in Q1 of 2023. Maintaining the momentum it recorded in 2022, the Dubai-based parent of programme specialist VistaJet sold just over 9,000 gross annual hours under its membership programme, together with what it described as a "high double digit" increase in revenues. With recent acquisitions of Air Hamburg and US operator Jet Edge, the group fleet now stands at more than 360 owned or managed aircraft. Annual hours sold in the US doubled YoY, whilst the Middle East recorded growth of more than 50%. Vista's founder and Chairman Thomas Flohr said: "Vista has a proven 19-year track record of growth and a prudent financial policy, which has enabled the group to build our global infrastructure to support all of our valued members around the world."

Flohr's remarks came in the wake of a report in the UK Financial Times that Vista's auditor had issued a 'going concern' warning. It included a report that Vista Global's debt had doubled to USD4.4 billion and that this was coupled with cumulative losses over four years that had reached USD436 million. Flohr was very active following the report in denying that there was any sense of Vista being in financial difficulty. He accounted for the losses largely by pointing to the firm's highly conservative 13-year depreciation schedule on aircraft owned by the group.

Corporate aircraft news

Textron Aviation stole most of the OEM headlines at this year's EBACE in Geneva with the unveiling of a new version of its iconic Citation 560XL family. The Cessna Citation Ascend, which is scheduled to enter service in 2025, looks set to extend the production life of the model for many years to come. The Citation Ascend will feature more powerful P&WC PW545D engines, autothrottles, Garmin G5000 avionics, increased payload and range, and a higher MTOW. The Ascend will also feature a flat cabin floor, which will provide passengers with more room when seated. The Citation 560XL first flew in February 1996 with certification following just over two years later. Designed to seat up to nine passengers, over 1,000 examples have since been delivered. Lannie O'Bannion, Senior VP – Global Sales and Flight Operations, said: "This is built on 20 years of 560XL success in the market. Whether for charter, personal transportation, or corporate flight departments, nothing competes with Ascend's cabin and performance."

In a notable landmark Textron Aviation also announced the roll-out of the 100th examples of its Citation Longitude super-size twinjet. The Longitude made its first flight in October 2016 with certification following just under three years later.

French OEM Dassault Aviation continues development of the Falcon 10X but has confirmed that supply chain issues continue. These mean that it cannot assure the market that the new flagship will receive certification as planned in 2025. In more positive news, it made clear at EBACE that it expects EASA certification of the new Falcon 6X twinjet 'within weeks'. Test vehicles have accumulated some 1,480 flight test hours as part of the certification programme.

On 12 May, Swiss manufacturer Pilatus Aircraft marked the delivery of the 2,000th example of its iconic PC-12 turboprop single. The landmark aircraft was handed over to US operator PlaneSense at a ceremony at the OEM's plant at Stans. The original PC-12 received FAA certification in July 1994.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

Airbus A350-900



CATEGORY

Heavy jet

MANUFACTURER

Airbus, multi-national

ENGINE

2 x Rolls-Royce Trent XWB turbofans

LENGTH

66.80 m

WINGSPAN

64.75 m

RANGE

15,372 km

MAX. SPEED

950 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

440 in airline service

NO. OF CREW

2

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

283,000 kg

DESCRIPTION

Of the 535 Airbus A350 aircraft produced thus far, just four are currently operating in a VVIP/corporate jet role. These are all based in Germany – three with the German Air Force and a single ACJ example with charter operator K5 Aviation. Nevertheless, the A350 in both its -900 and -1000 variants has proved extremely popular with commercial airlines worldwide and offers direct competition to Boeing and its 777 and 787 Dreamliner ranges. The fuel efficient, wide-bodied, long range A350 is seen as the natural successor to the four-engined A340 within the Airbus family. It shares a common type rating with the Airbus A330 family, providing operators with fleet efficiency.

The A350 was a 'clean sheet' design aimed directly at competing with Boeing's offering in the twin-engined long-range market. The A350XWB ('extra wide body') prototype made its first flight on 14 June 2013 from the OEM's plant in Toulouse. later. The first A350 (a -900) entered service with Qatar Airways in January 2015.