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'Climbing fast' at NBAA-BACE 2023

'Sustainability' may have been the overriding theme at this year's NBAA-BACE – held in Las Vegas from 17 to 19 October – but it was given additional focus with the launch of a new 'Climbing. Fast.' campaign. This multi-media advocacy campaign is intended to coordinate and elevate a message about the game-changing technologies that are fostering business aviation sustainability on the ground and in the air.

Climbing. Fast. aims to highlight the business aviation sector's progress towards net-zero emissions by 2050 and take this message to policymakers, opinion leaders and other key audiences, informing perceptions about the industry's sustainability record and value. Further information can be accessed at <https://www.climbingfast.com>

This year's event saw more than 800 exhibitors and forums alongside education sessions aimed at promoting sustainability and carrying through the message of the new campaign. But in terms of numbers, the event offered a much-reduced static aircraft display and, according to WingX data, fewer arrivals during the show than the 2019 event.

In summing up the show, NBAA president and CEO Ed Bolen said: "This year's NBAA-BACE was unforgettable on every level. We saw history in the making, with new types of carbon-free aircraft taking flight, a new advocacy initiative launched to champion the industry's mission to net-zero flying, and a new generation of leaders making this industry all their own. This incredible week, the future started to become reality."

Opinion - What is the future of large scale bizav events?

Perhaps alarm bells should have started ringing when I reported that Gulfstream Aerospace was not going to exhibit or have any substantial presence at this year's NBAA-BACE. In fact, this year's static display was a shadow of former years, and the published opinions of seasoned observers only serve to amplify those warnings. There may no longer be unanimous sector support for such large events, writes Brian T Richards.

Staging large scale bizav events now is a very different proposition to just a decade ago. Promoting an industry that is an easy target for criticism in a world of climate protests and an increasingly negative press is a considerable challenge. The way OEMs sell aircraft is also changing as Gulfstream's use of smaller customer-focused events demonstrates. One comment on the side-lines of NBAA-BACE was illuminating: "The biggest winner from the NBAA show is the NBAA. The show has become just a big networking and job fair." There is certainly an argument that these events can serve the organiser's agenda more than the exhibitors and customers. Whether the appetite for events in the same format or on the same scale will continue is now open to question and the continuing support of OEMs will be a key indicator for the future.

Forecast demand for new bizjets

There will be an estimated 8,500 new bizjet deliveries between 2024 and 2033, according to the annual Global Business Aviation Outlook, which was published by Honeywell Aerospace on the side-lines of the NBAA-BACE event. These new aircraft will have a combined value of some USD278 billion. As part of the forecast, Honeywell estimates that deliveries next year will be 10% higher than 2023. In line with projected annual economic growth new bizjet deliveries and expenditure are expected to grow at an average rate of 2% per year.

Volatility continues in bizav traffic

Overall bizav traffic at the end of October was back to the highs of 2022, just shy of the peaks of surging demand in 2021, and almost 20% higher than pre-Covid levels, according to the latest data from analyst WingX. But this optimism had changed by the end of the first week of November, suggesting continued volatility in global traffic.

Focusing on Europe, the latest bizjet traffic figures show activity fell by 19% against the same period last year and was 4% behind 2019. Several European airports – including Farnborough, Le Bourget and Geneva – have reported double digit falls against the same period in 2022. Middle East traffic has also fallen amidst the uncertainty caused by the conflict in Gaza.

Russian bizav struggles with sanctions

Multiple recent reports in Russian media have underlined the impact of international sanctions on the local bizav sector. Since sweeping international sanctions were introduced in 2022 in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, owners and operators have struggled to maintain operations. Several fleet operators are apparently now actively looking at using re-purposed Russian-built commercial airliners for operations in a VIP role. For example, business newspaper Kommersant reports that energy company Gazprom and space agency Roscosmos are looking to use TU-204 aircraft in the role as a replacement for large cabin aircraft such as the BBJ and ACJ, which are now covered by sanctions.

AVIATION SERVICES HUB:

Corporate ownership

Leveraging the Sovereign Group's wealth of experience in the provision of corporate services, RANA offers ownership solutions that are tailored specifically to aviation assets. We can recommend appropriate jurisdictions and corporate structures to provide asset protection, including tax and succession planning, as well as advising on the requirements and restrictions of particular registries.

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. 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.

Q3 deliveries - OEM numbers

Apart from Dassault Aviation, which reports on a six-month basis, each of the remaining major OEMs have reported their Q3 deliveries.

Gulfstream Aerospace – although anticipating a very strong Q4, with up to 60 deliveries and certification of the new G700, Q3 numbers continued to reflect the OEM's challenges from supply chain issues. Gulfstream delivered 27 aircraft in Q3, down from 35 in Q3 2022. This year's tally comprised 22 large cabin aircraft and five G280 mid-size.

Textron Aviation – the Wichita-based OEM delivered 39 Citation jets in Q3, along with 38 turboprops. The former was the same number as Q3 2022 while the latter showed an increase of five over the same period last year. The manufacturer also reflected a strong order backlog of USD7.4 billion.

Embraer Executive Jets – the Brazilian OEM delivered 28 bizjets in Q3, comprising two Phenom 100, 17 Phenom 300, four Praetor 500 and five Praetor 600. In Q3 2022, by comparison, Embraer delivered 23 aircraft – two Phenom 100, 13 Phenom 300, four Praetor 500 and four Praetor 600. Its order backlog is valued at USD4.3 billion.

Bombardier – the Canadian OEM delivered 31 aircraft in Q3, comprising 16 Challengers and 15 Globals. This compares to 25 in the same period last year, made up of 12 Challengers and 13 Globals. Bombardier made it clear that it expects to meet its full year target of 138 deliveries despite industry-wide supply chain challenges.

Corporate aircraft news

OEMs often use the large flagship bizav events to unveil new designs or upgrades to existing models. NBAA-BACE 2023 was no different, although there were none that stole headlines.

Textron Aviation unveiled an upgraded version of the Citation CJ3, which first flew in April 2003 and is the most popular version of the CJ family. The CJ3 Gen2 incorporates upgrades based on feedback from existing customers and offers a new exterior colour scheme, redesigned boarding steps and a cockpit featuring both Garmin G3000 avionics and auto throttles. The cabin has also been redesigned to provide more legroom and a flexible layout to provide additional baggage storage. The CJ3 Gen2 is due to enter service in 2025.

Brazilian OEM Embraer also used Las Vegas to unveil a revamped version of its Phenom 100 light jet. The Phenom 100EX has a redesigned interior allowing wider seats but also using more sustainable materials to save some weight from the aircraft. It offers more cockpit space and an 'open concept' easing communications between the crew and cabin. The first delivery is expected by the end of December.

Swiss manufacturer Pilatus has added some performance and cabin enhancements to its PC-24 jet. By making 'tweaks' to the airframe, the OEM has secured a small payload increase and range uplift of 371km (200nm). Changes to the cabin include a reduction in ambient noise, a new cabin layout option and cabin management system. The enhancements will be standard on new aircraft delivered next year.

Having unveiled its new light jet (Concept 2600) at EBACE in May, Honda Aircraft used Las Vegas to provide more details and give the project a new name. The HA-480 Echelon is expected to receive certification and enter service in 2028. The Echelon will seat up to 11 passengers and will share many common design features with the smaller in-service HondaJet.

Just ahead of the NBAA-BACE, French OEM Daher delivered the 500th example from the TBM900 turboprop single family. The first aircraft entered service in 2014.

Textron Aviation also announced in Las Vegas that it had delivered the 100th example of the King Air 360. The 360, the latest in a long line of King Airs, received FAA certification in October 2020.

Finally, Bombardier confirmed the delivery of the 150th example of its flagship Global 7500. The worldwide 7500 fleet has now accrued more than 100,000 flying hours since entering service in December 2018.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

Lockheed JetStar



CATEGORY

Super mid-size jet

MANUFACTURER

Lockheed Corporation, USA

ENGINE

4 x Garrett TFE-731-3 turbofan

LENGTH

18.41 m

WINGSPAN

16.59 m

RANGE

4,820 km

MAX. SPEED

883kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

10

NO. OF CREW

2

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

20,185 kg

DESCRIPTION

The Lockheed JetStar holds a place of honour among aircraft as the first dedicated business jet ever to enter service. The aircraft was also the only bizjet to be produced by the Lockheed Corporation. The JetStar first flew on 4 September 1957, entering service in 1960 and, by the time production ceased in 1978, a total of 204 examples had been produced. N313JS – the JetStar pictured above at Fort Lauderdale in 2008 – was the last regularly used example. It was withdrawn from use in 2019 and donated to the Marietta Aviation History & Technology Centre. It is now on display at Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Georgia.

The principal in-service version of the aircraft was the 731 JetStar, which featured Garrett TFE-731 turbofans that countered the high fuel consumption and noise output of earlier versions which used less sophisticated powerplant. Efficient engines were a vitally important factor because, unusually, the JetStar used four of them in a design reminiscent of the Ilyushin IL-62 and Vickers VC10 commercial airliners.