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NBAA 2015 - "showcasing our industry's vitality and relevance"

The National Business Aviation Association's (NBAA) Convention & Exhibition was the strongest edition of the annual show since the economic downturn. This year's event, which returned to Las Vegas from 17-19 November, attracted some 1,100 exhibitors and more than 27,000 attendees, marking the highest level of participation since 2008. It also featured over 100 aircraft on static display at the convention centre and nearby Henderson Executive Airport. NBAA President and CEO Ed Bolen said: "In addition to the strong participation from exhibitors and attendees alike, our industry's largest event once again showcased the size and significance of the business aviation community, as well as the passion and professionalism of its people."

The event's opening general session featured both political and industry leaders including Governor Mary Fallin of Oklahoma and FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. Captain Chesley Sullenberger, the "Hero of the Hudson", headlined the opening session on the second day of the conference. New to this year's NBAA was the National Safety Forum which was held on 19 November and which featured discussions among industry and government leaders on major safety issues confronting corporate aircraft operators.

A year after Gulfstream Aerospace unveiled two new large-cabin jets at NBAA 2014, the prototype G500 arrived at Henderson Executive Airport from the manufacturer's plant at Savannah, Georgia. The G500 is expected to receive certification upon completion of the test programme in 2017. Gulfstream also displayed a new interior mock-up of the G600 featuring enhancements, which it described as "customer inspired".

Not to be outdone, Textron Aviation displayed a ground test vehicle Citation Longitude at Henderson with a full production interior. The first Longitude is scheduled to fly by the end of Q2 2016, with deliveries to begin just over a year later. It will seat up to 12 passengers and offers a maximum range of 6,297km (3,400 nautical miles). French manufacturer Dassault used NBAA 2015 to debut its new Falcon 8X in North America. The company's flagship tri jet is expected to enter service in the second half of 2016. The displayed example subsequently joined two sister ships at the company's facility in Little Rock, Arkansas, for interior completion.

NBAA 2016 will return to Orlando, Florida, from 1-3 November.

Cessna launches the Citation Hemisphere

Manufacturers generally use the NBAA stage to launch new models. NBAA 2015 was no exception. Textron has announced its largest and longest range Cessna Citation, which will compete directly with the Gulfstream G450. The Citation Hemisphere is a completely clean sheet design and is being heralded as offering the widest cabin of any aircraft in its class (at 259.08cm). The aircraft is scheduled to make its first flight in 2019 and will offer a range of 8,334km (4,500 nautical miles). The large cabin will accommodate up to 12 passengers and the aircraft will be powered by Snecma Silvercrest turboprops – the same engines which will power Dassault's new Falcon 5X twin. It is understood that the aircraft unit price will be \$30-35 million.

Gulfstream G650 heads for 150

The first example of Gulfstream Aerospace's flagship G650 was delivered to an American owner on 27 December 2012. Just three years later, 145 of the ultra-long-range aircraft are now in service – 105 standard G650 and 40 extended range G650ER. According to the manufacturer, the worldwide G650 fleet has accumulated more than 78,000 hours and 29,000 cycles. The G650ER offers a range of 13,890km (7,500 nautical miles) – the greatest range of any corporate jet currently available. The G650ER was first announced during EBACE 2014 with FAA certification being granted in October 2014. Deliveries commenced two months later.

Another decline in business flying

The latest issue of Business Aviation Monitor, the snapshot of market activity published monthly by Hamburg-based WINGX Advance, continues with the gloomy headlines that have featured for most of 2015. It reports that European business aviation departures in October totalled 67,209 – a decline of 3.4% over the same period in 2014. Total flight hours fell by some 5%. Overall, European flying is down by 0.6% for the full year. Flight activity fell substantially in southern Europe, with both Spain and Italy recording sizeable declines. The uncertain political and economic situation in Russia and Turkey continues to be reflected in the statistics with a decline of 25% YoY.

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Consultancy

Sound, up-to-date and comprehensive information is a key requirement for making the right decisions in respect of 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, registries and operators across the globe.

The wide spectrum of our expertise encompasses: technical and performance specifications of competing aircraft models – from small pistons and turboprops through the whole range of corporate jets to commercial airliners; 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.

Flexjet goes supersonic

Clearly winning the battle of the headlines at NBAA 2015 was US fractional specialist operator Flexjet, which placed a firm order for 20 AS2 supersonic corporate jets from US aircraft manufacturer Aerion Corp. The first delivery is expected in 2023 with the deal worth some \$2.4 billion at current list prices. It is understood that the deal has been secured by a non-refundable deposit. In 2014, Reno-based Aerion announced a technical collaboration on the AS2 project with Airbus to provide components for the new aircraft. The tri-jet will accommodate up to 12 passengers and will fly at a speed of mach 1.5 (1,852kmh).

According to Flexjet CEO Michael Silvestro: "The Aerion AS2 is a genuine game-changer for international travel, providing the world's only commercially available supersonic transportation, enabling travellers to have breakfast with their family in New York, enjoy a business lunch in London and be back home to help their children with their homework. The Aerion AS2, together with our Global Access international programme, will accelerate our evolution towards becoming the world leader in providing long-range private jet travel." Aerion is currently in the process of identifying the location for its production facility, which is expected to be on the US east or west coast. It is understood that the choice will be announced early in 2016 to coincide with the formal launch of the AS2 project.

"Significant expansion" in Africa

Hong Kong-based broker Asian Sky Group has forecast a "significant expansion" in the African corporate jet market. According to its recently published 2015 Africa Business Jet Fleet Report, several key economies are reflecting GDP growth in excess of 3% with the trend pointing resolutely upwards, but the scale of corporate jet fleets does not reflect this economic strength. It reported that the current African business jet fleet totals some 524 aircraft, with the largest fleets being located in South Africa (197) and Nigeria (97). The report also notes that the average age of aircraft in service is 19 years – considerably higher than in other parts of the world. The message is clear – manufacturers need to look at tapping an under-performing market with demand expected to grow.

Corporate aircraft news

Canadian manufacturer Bombardier celebrated a double certification for its new Challenger 650 as the aircraft received type approval from Transport Canada on 9 November, with the FAA following suit a few days later. In a significant performance landmark for the firm, a Global 6000 operated by NetJets has set two new city-pair speed records involving three airports regarded as "challenging". The aircraft recently flew non-stop from Aspen, Colorado, to London City Airport (LCY) in eight hours – 7,719km at 1,099kmh (mach 0.89). The aircraft also undertook a round trip routing to Lugano in the Swiss Alps – 1,782km in two hours, 43 minutes.

Remanufacture specialist Nextant Aerospace has received FAA certification for its G90XT rework of the King Air C90. The redesign offers a new Regent digital flight deck, interior, pressurisation control and new GE H75-100 turboprops.

The long-awaited full FAA certification of the HondaJet HA-420 was confirmed in an emotional announcement by Honda Aircraft CEO Michimasa Fujino speaking from the company's Greensboro, North Carolina headquarters on 9 December. The Japanese-owned manufacturer can now start deliveries of the 100+ aircraft that it has on order.

US manufacturer One Aviation also used the stage at the NBAA to announce that its entry level Eclipse 550 has received certification from European regulator EASA. This type certificate will allow delivery to the first European customers from January 2016. In a further boost to the programme, China's Jinggong General Aviation announced that it had placed an order for 20 Eclipse 550s, valued at \$60 million.

The team at RegisterAnAircraft.com and the Sovereign Group would like to send all readers of 'Airborne' season's greetings and our best wishes for 2016



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

Airbus A310-300



CATEGORY

Heavy jet

MANUFACTURER

Airbus, multi-national

ENGINE

2 P&W PW4156A or CFM Intl. CF6-80C2A8 turbofans

LENGTH

46.66 m

WINGSPAN

43.90 m

RANGE

9,600 km

MAX. SPEED

901 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

Up to 275 in airline layout

NO. OF CREW

2

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

164,000 kg

DESCRIPTION

While most of the world's airlines have withdrawn the Airbus A310 from passenger routes, a number remain in both the cargo role and as transports for VIPs (usually operated by government air wings). The A310 – the second commercial aircraft to be produced by the European multi-national consortium – followed the success of the larger A300, which first entered commercial service in 1974. The A310 was revealed to the industry in 1978 and made its first flight in April 1982. The design featured a substantially shortened fuselage, a new wing, new horizontal tail surfaces and a two-crew EFIS flight deck.

The A310-300 is the standard long-range version of the base -200 and first entered commercial service in 1985. A large number of airline operated aircraft were converted to carry freight and small parcel specialist FedEx retains a number of active examples. Aircraft in the VIP role continue in operation with the French and German air forces and the Royal Canadian Air Force among others.