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Isle of Man conference dominated by Brexit

The uncertainty surrounding the post-'Brexit' aviation relationship between the UK and the EU continued to exercise minds at the 8th annual Isle of Man Aviation Conference, held within the spectacular Edwardian grandeur of the Royal Hall in the Villa Marina complex on the Douglas seafront on 13 June.

Organised by Martyn Fiddler Aviation in conjunction with the Isle of Man Aircraft Registry (IOMAR), the event once again attracted some 150 industry professionals from all sectors of corporate aviation from the Isle of Man, the UK and further afield. Chaired by Graham Williamson, president of TAG Aviation Europe, the conference programme was varied and lively – the continuing success of the Manx registry, the role of the European Business Aviation Association (EBAA), managing risk, carbon emissions and operations.

One subject however overshadowed much of the discussion during the day and during the evening's networking events. The implications of Brexit, the future relationship of the UK to the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the thorny issue of VAT and potential exit from the Customs Union showed how many questions need answers exactly two years on from the referendum in 2016 and less than 10 months before the UK's scheduled departure from the EU on Friday, 29 March 2019.

Wijet to abandon UK AOC due to Brexit uncertainty

Luxemburg-headquartered very light jet charter operator Wijet confirmed that it is to surrender its only AOC, which is registered in the UK, and will instead arrange for its fleet to be operated by third party partners within the EU. Wijet obtained the AOC as part of its acquisition of UK-based Blink in September 2016, which created the world's largest very light jet-equipped air taxi company. It recently announced that it would be upgrading its current fleet of 15 Cessna Citation Mustangs with 16 HA-420 HondaJets.

In a statement, the company highlighted a less than favourable cost structure, integration and operational issues with the Blink acquisition, but it also made clear that the uncertainty around the UK's exit from the EU had played a significant part in its decision. "The doubts around the deadline of March 2019 from the EASA accelerated the decision to look for a solution to continue operating flights within the EU. Intra-UK flights accounted for less than 10% of the group's sales," said Jean François Hochenauser, executive board member of Wijet Holdings. "Owning an Airline Certificate, especially in view of the Brexit, is not a competitive advantage."

JetSmarter opens up for non-members

JetSmarter, which markets itself as "the world's largest private air travel and lifestyle community", has announced that it is to open up its service to non-members. Using the company's high profile app, non-members will be able to book seats on the company's shared and private flights, but at higher rates than those available to members who currently pay a minimum fee of US\$4,950 pa. Non-members will also be able to initiate flights, which is the key to driving growth for JetSmarter because they provide 90% of the inventory of flights available for members who want to buy seats.

Jersey Aircraft Register - "the white elephant in the hangar"

Following the recent decision by the Channel Island of Jersey to pass control of its struggling aircraft register (JAR) to the Ports of Jersey (PoJ) operator, PoJ chief executive Doug Bannister has revealed that it is now looking to secure the services of a registration or technical service provider.

In an interview in the Jersey Evening Post, Bannister said: "I am working closely with Economic Development and there is a collective acknowledgement that perhaps the model wasn't right. We need to secure the services of a registration or technical service provider, because that is the gatekeeper for allowing aircraft onto the register. We are trying to identify candidates for that role. We are also considering a number of delivery options. Some work is going on with outsourcing the commercial and operations side, so the function of identifying and landing aircraft on to the registrar would be done by a third party in a way not dissimilar to others."

The JAR was launched in November 2015 but has disappointed in comparison with the Channel Islands Aircraft Register, 2-REG, which is based on the neighbouring island of Guernsey. Since inception the JAR has added just two aircraft (one fixed-wing and one rotary) of which only a Citation CJ4 remains current. It is understood that the set-up and ongoing costs of the JAR now total more than £800,000.

AVIATION SERVICES HUB:

Aviation insurance

Sovereign Insurance Services (SIS) is a fully licensed, independent general insurance intermediary, based in Gibraltar. The strength of the Sovereign brand combined with the expertise and experience of the SIS team has enabled it to build relationships with leading insurers throughout the world. With direct links to specialist underwriters based in London and elsewhere, SIS can provide wide-ranging bespoke insurance cover for owners of fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. The team further offers market insight, expertise and competitive pricing, together with efficient and professional claims' handling.

Specialist aviation insurance covers the full range – from public liability through to hull insurance for new or used airframes. The SIS team will quote on all types of aviation asset – from corporate jets and turboprops, general aviation aircraft and helicopters to FBOs, flying schools or commercial passenger or freight operators. SIS also specialises in areas such as kidnap and ransom insurance, which may be of interest to aircraft owners and operators.

IOM and Brexit – “business as usual”

Dominating many discussions during this year’s Isle of Man Aviation Conference on 13 June was the uncertainty caused by the UK’s impending exit from the European Union. In a blog post published on the Isle of Man Aircraft Registry (IOMAR) website shortly afterwards, Colin Gill, the island’s Deputy Director of Civil Aviation summarised the IOMAR and wider Manx government approach to Brexit. Colin Gill noted that “The Isle of Man is not a member of the European Union – Brexit will not result in any changes to our aviation legislation. Regardless of the Brexit arrangements that are eventually agreed, on aviation safety regulation matters the IOMAR will carry on business as we do today.”

European jet activity continues to rise

The latest analysis by Hamburg-based specialist WINGX Advance reports that European business jet activity rose by some 3% in May. This figure builds in to a year-to-date growth of some 2.3%, a fall however on last year’s comparable figure at just over 3%. As usual there was significant variation between particular markets – traffic in France fell by 2%, in Italy by 4%, in Austria by 5% and in Turkey by 15%, whereas the numbers in Greece were up by the same amount.

First Jersey operator gains Guernsey AOC

Aircraft management specialist Ortac has become the first Jersey-based operation to be awarded an AOC by 2-REG, the Channel Islands Aircraft Register based on the neighbouring island of Guernsey. Ortac managing director Tobi Matthews said: “We can now operate aircraft commercially and help our clients to offset their running costs by making their aircraft available for charter.” By the end of this month, the AOC will boast a Citation Bravo along with a newly delivered CJ3+ and Citation M2. The company takes its name from the Ortac navigation waypoint which, it notes, “marks the entrance to the Channel Islands’ airspace between the UK and France.”

Corporate aircraft news

Bombardier Aerospace confirmed that the first production examples of its flagship Global 7500 have now entered the company’s completion centre at Dorval, Quebec. The five FTV (flight test vehicle) aircraft have accumulated some 2,300 hours as part of the flight test programme that began in 2016. The aircraft is expected to receive certification and enter service by the end of this year.

Pilatus announced that its ground-breaking Pilatus PC-24, which received FAA and EASA certification last year, has now embarked on a series of post-certification tests focusing in particular on the aircraft’s ability to use unpaved runways. Marketed as the world’s first ‘super versatile jet’, a test aircraft made the model’s first landing on an unpaved runway at Woodbridge Airfield, to the north of London on 19 June. Pilatus hopes to obtain ‘rough-field certification’ for the design by the end of this year. It is understood that the testing at Woodbridge would take some two weeks and will be used to assess the aircraft’s take-off and landing abilities on the airfield’s gravel runway. One of the launch customers for the PC-24 is the Australian Royal Flying Doctor Service, which relies on aircraft capable of using remote grass and dirt landing strips.

Textron Aviation has announced that it is to cease production of the iconic Cessna Citation X as it clears the decks for the introduction of its super mid-size Citation Longitude. Manufacture of the final version (the Citation X+) will phase out a design that has been in continuous production since 1995. The Citation X was originally announced at the NBAA in 1990 with the first flight being made in December 1993. The first aircraft was delivered to US golfer Arnold Palmer in mid-1996. Over its career the Citation X has set a number of major speed records and its velocity has been a major selling point over its rivals. In 2010 the manufacturer unveiled a major upgrade for the design, now known as the Citation X+. The final production version featured new avionics, up-rated engines and elliptical winglets. When the production line ends, the manufacturer will have completed some 338 examples. A number of industry experts have hailed the Citation X as a design masterpiece. Corporate Jet Investor’s Alud Davies described it as “the Lamborghini Countach of business aviation”. It will be much missed by its many admirers.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \ \

Bombardier Global 7500



CATEGORY

Large size jet

MANUFACTURER

Bombardier, Canada

ENGINE

2 x General Electric Passport turbofans

LENGTH

33.90 m

WINGSPAN

31.70 m

RANGE

14,269 km

MAX. SPEED

1,133 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

19

NO. OF CREW

2

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

48,194 kg

DESCRIPTION

Bombardier’s new flagship has stolen headlines and garnered superlatives since being renamed as the Global 7500 during EBACE 2018 in Geneva. The former Global 7000 is described as “a new class of business jet” and is claimed by the manufacturer to be “the world’s largest and longest range business jet”.

The Global 7000 and its smaller sister ship were announced in 2010 and scheduled for service entry in 2016. The programme suffered several delays and the first flight test vehicle only took to the skies for the first time on 4 November 2016. After a lengthy flight test programme, the first production aircraft are now being readied for service entry following certification, which is scheduled for the second half of this year. The production Global 7500 offers a maximum operating range of 14,269km (7,700nm), which takes it beyond Gulfstream’s G650ER (13,899km/7,500nm). The cabin features four distinct living spaces, along with a full kitchen and crew suite.