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BUSINESS AVIATION: PRIVATE JET OWNERSHIP

The choice is yours: The G6500 can access challenging airports such as London City and has the industry's first 4K-enabled cabin. Photo: Bombardier

To buy or not to buy

Michael Doran gives a helping hand to those considering joining the private jet community; defining a future owner's requirement and determining if ownership is the preferred option.

Apart from adding multiple zeros to the price, it seems buying a private jet has a lot in common with buying the family car. The key questions the salesperson wants answering sound much the same – how many people, where do you want to go and how much have you got to spend?

As commercial aviation stumbles on and off the path to recovery, those who can are looking at private aviation as a safe, healthy and controllable alternative to travelling with the masses. The appetite for hub and spoke models has fallen victim to the pandemic and, with so few commercial direct flights available, enquiries for private jet services are literally taking off.

Starting at the beginning, Inflight is taking a look at how the private jet buying process works from two quite different perspectives; the VVIP world where a blank canvas means exactly that to the high end of business jets with their seemingly endless choices of leathers, colours and en-suites.

Focused on the very high-end of private aviation, Camber Aviation Management specialises in transforming a green aircraft with no interior into a unique, beautiful corporate jet to transport ultra-high net worth individuals, corporate leaders and head of state clients.

As completion managers, Camber oversees the process from accepting the green aircraft right through to final delivery, and its team has managed the conversion or refurbishment of 29 aircraft, ranging in size from a Falcon to a Challenger to a Boeing 747.

Its CEO, Tom Chatfield, says the key to a successful VVIP project is being involved in the process as early as possible, and for him, that means spending a couple of days teasing out what the potential client really needs and wants in a corporate jet.

From this, he gets an understanding of who will be flying, where they are going, how often and what they want to do onboard, or as Chatfield says "range, number of people and mission profile".

"If it's you and your partner and you're making lots of long-range trips, you may be looking at something like a Falcon, a Gulfstream, or a Bombardier Global, depending on how far you want to travel," he says. "Using Australia as an example, let's say you'd like to go to China and perhaps onto London, then something like a Global or a Gulfstream would be great.

"At the other extreme I have a gentleman with a Global who says it works fantastic for my wife and I and two or three business associates, but I would really like to take 30 friends to the Caribbean," Chatfield tells Inflight. "You can get a 767 right now for 10 to 12 million [US Dollars] and put 5 million into it, so for less than 20 million you've got an airplane that he can take all of his friends on with a big lounge, a bedroom, a shower and a great galley."

The way a client wants to use the aircraft is another key decider, with one happy to have a beer, sandwich and sleep while another might want an onboard chef serving an excellent meal for family and friends to enjoy, which influences the galley design.

"For me, the most important part is to let the guy spill out what he wants by encouraging him to speak," he explains. "Ask open questions, and they will guide themselves to the answer.

> "A big part of our job is to teach people… I see it as part of our responsibility in the industry. The more informed the person that comes to talk with us is, the more intelligent a conversation we can have."
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> **Tom Chatfield, CEO, Camber Aviation Management**

With more floorspace than the A319 or 737 MAX 7, the A220 has great potential for VVIP conversions. © Camber Aviation Management, Kestrel Aviation Management and Pierrejean Vision 2019.

"The solution might even be you don't fly very much so why don't you charter one and splurge on the biggest one you want, and you're saving money," he adds. "So about a third of the time we shoot ourselves in the foot and say we think you don't really need one.

"A big part of our job is to teach people… I see it as part of our responsibility in the industry. The more informed the person that comes to talk with us is, the more intelligent a conversation we can have," says Chatfield.

Following these discussions Chatfield has a further list of the things that are important to discover, and to get a feel for the client's style they visit their house, look at their car and yacht, if they have one, and from that suggest a few designers to get the ball rolling.

Camber prefers to work with designers who have a strong industrial engineering background because "we can say this is what we can do in this area, these are the stay-out zones where the power and water lines are, and we have an understanding of where the limitations are".

"If they have that understanding before they start designing, you're going to have 95% of the problems taken care of right there, and the client has a much better feeling because you are not constantly in conflict with the designer."

The Airbus A220 has proven successful in a range of markets and its potential as a VVIP aircraft has been given a boost by Camber teaming up with Kestrel Aviation Management and Pierrejean Vision to produce unique cabin concepts for the aircraft.

The A220 is the first clean-sheet narrowbody airliner to be certified in 35 years and has more cabin floor space and volume than either the Airbus A319 or Boeing MAX 7 airliners. Together, the team invested more than 18 months in the detailed design of the cabin, which Chatfield says is innovative, highly functional and reliable.

FUTURE SHOP?

With every corporate airplane interior being a reflection of the owner's needs, tastes and budget, how do the decisions made at the start reflect what happens when the time comes to sell it? One approach is for the designer to gently nudge the original owner into leaving the more idiosyncratic ideas at the door so as to make it a little more attractive to the next buyer.

But for those to whom money is not an issue, Chatfield reveals they might say, "I'm going to keep the airplane for the next 15 years, and at the end of it I don't care if I get one million or five million for it, I've had my joy for 15 years with the airplane."

Looking at the markets for corporate aircraft, the Middle East has traditionally been the driver, but Camber is now seeing more opportunities from second and third-tier countries.

"We've done a little bit in Africa, and I think there is huge potential there, and I'm also hearing from colleagues that South America is building more and more; more out of the region trying to bring business in.

"We are also seeing entrepreneurs who, not in the middle of COVID, of course, recognise that face to face meeting is very successful in closing a deal, so there are quite a few people who do that," he says. "We have worked in the Middle East, Europe, North America, and we've done some work in Asia."

While COVID has decimated the commercial airline sector, there are signs that private aviation is becoming an attractive option for those who can afford it. "Wealthy people are saying we've travelled first or business class but let's try the private jet and then they don't really want to go back," he says. "From there, people are building up into fractional [ownership] and a small portion of those are bumping into [full] ownership.

"The NBAA did an investigation saying there are around 700 touchpoints on a commercial flight which the passenger would come into contact with other people and on a private flight it's somewhere between 25 and 35, so there's a huge difference," he outlines.

Having offloaded its commercial aircraft business, Bombardier is fully focused on the private jet market and in the long-range sector offers the Challenger and Global types, capable of carrying between 10-19 passengers on sectors from London to Dubai and London to Singapore.

With the Global 7500 selling for around $70 million, Bombardier puts a team of its experienced staff around each new customer to support them as they select the aircraft, design the cabin and take them right through to delivery.

The cabin design of the A220 took more than 18 months to complete, says Camber's CEO Tom Chatfield. © Camber Aviation Management, Kestrel Aviation Management and Pierrejean Vision 2019.

> "We also continue to see a high interest in our Challenger aircraft family and interest in the Global and Challenger aircraft has remained strong during the pandemic."
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> **Thomas Fissellier, Director Strategy & Analytics, Bombardier**

When a client decides to buy an aircraft, a Customer Account Manager is assigned to assist them in selecting the individual specification for the airplane covering the features and equipment that suit their needs.

Bombardier designers are also involved with the customer to select the cabin decor. Thomas Fissellier, the Canadian OEM's Director of Strategy & Analytics, says there is a 'spec room' in Montreal that features the full assortment of materials for customers to see, touch and feel, such as the fabrics that will adorn their aircraft.

WHATEVER YOU WANT

"Business aviation allows passengers to control their itineraries and greatly reduce their number of contacts compared to commercial flight," Fissellier tells Inflight. "Full ownership gives you the freedom to travel where you want, when you want and with the passengers you want."

The flagship of the fleet is the Global 7500 which has a range of 14,260 km, a top speed of 0.925 Mach and capable of carrying 19 passengers in a cabin protected with HEPA air filtration. Bombardier says the G7500, which entered service in 2018, is the world's largest and longest-range business jet that can connect Singapore to San Francisco, New York to Hong Kong and London to Singapore.

"We also continue to see a high interest in our Challenger aircraft family and interest in the Global and Challenger aircraft has remained strong during the pandemic," he adds. "Our sales are driven from many regions, notably North America, where we've seen strong sales activity during the third quarter of 2020 but also in Europe and Russia."

Bombardier aircraft are available for fractional and charter ownership as well as full ownership, but Fissellier says full ownership gives owners the opportunity to charter their aircraft to offset some of their costs, as well as selecting the individual styling and layout they prefer.

"We are seeing increased interest in charter, fractional and full ownership of business aircraft as businesses and individuals look for the safest way to keep travelling without sacrificing peace of mind," he says.

Apart from full ownership, there are two other basic models for accessing private jets, fractional ownership or part-time plans.

Fractional ownership gives clients ownership of a share of a specific aircraft via a management company, such as NetJets. Shares are usually allocated as a whole, quarter, eighth or sixteenth. A sixteenth share would typically allocate the owner 50 flying hours per year. In the case of NetJets, this gives access to a fleet of more than 750 aircraft worldwide with guaranteed access with just four to six hours' notice.

Membership plans are available from charter brokers who assemble blocks of time from charter companies, which are then sold as 'jet-memberships' or 'block-time cards' to members. The simplest and most cost-effective way to join the private aviation world is by contacting a jet charter firm and making a booking, which can be quickly done online. ■

Bombardier's G7500 can connect London to Singapore so a good bed is a top priority. Photo: Bombardier

The chaise lounge in the G6500 cabin is a great spot for an after-lunch siesta. Photo: Bombardier

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