

EVA

SUMMER 2020

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INTERNATIONAL



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CATHERINE BUCHANAN, COO
CHALLENGING REALITY

Happier, Healthier, Humidified: CTT – Peter Landquist, VP Sales & Marketing

Big Plans, New Future: ASL Group – ASL Group Safety Manager and pilot Maxime Wauters

Extraordinary Business, as Usual: Collins Aerospace – Dori Henderson, Vice President Business Aviation & Digital Solutions

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Boswell Cottage, 19 South End,
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Tel: +44 (0) 20 8253 4000
Fax: +44 (0) 20 8603 7369

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Editor's Comments

Industry Leaders Driving Sustainability

I've been writing about aviation since 1996. I was working in West London on 11 September 2001 and vividly remember the big jets, turned back from the US, holding for landing slots at Heathrow. I'm certain we were still writing about the repercussions of 9/11 when the 2007/08 global financial crisis presented new challenges that beleaguered the industry, cost jobs and changed lives.

Now the world is beginning to see a way forwards from the coronavirus pandemic, a new crisis that has and will continue to beleague the aviation industry, cost jobs and, tragically, take lives. It has affected everything. This edition of *EVA*, for example, so carefully crafted for May's cancelled EBACE show, has been rethought and reworked as almost every article fell by the wayside or became irrelevant.

And yet, after proofing the final version, I was left with a sense of hope. It's true that job losses have already been announced and companies are struggling to survive in every one of our industry's niches, but the stories of adaptability, resilience and renewal collected in this summer edition neatly summarise the industry's response to this latest global crisis.

One industry veteran noted in a recent Zoom call: "It's OK to be in business aviation now. We don't have to make excuses anymore, because now people can see what we do." It's true. Out of this awful crisis, business aviation has the opportunity to show the world exactly that which it does so well – move people efficiently and quickly, at range, safely and discretely, whenever and wherever they need to go.

I could compose more editorial fluff in hopes of spreading my own take on an already well-understood message but, instead, I'll use the words of another

industry stalwart, Dori Henderson, Vice President Business Aviation & Digital Solutions at Collins Aerospace, quoted in this edition: "...this is an exceptional industry and having seen how my team is reacting to the crisis and how they work with customers, I think what we've done is no more than our customers would expect. It's exactly right they should expect this of us, but it's an approach and relationship I've never seen in any other industry.

"Business aviation is a smaller, more agile industry than commercial aviation, able to make decisions far more rapidly. So, it really is uniquely positioned to drive and lead change, post-crisis. It's an opportunity for business aviation to make a change for the whole world."



Paul E Eden

Editor
paul@evaint.com

James Sheridan
Chairman
james@evaint.com

Gemma Keen
Events Coordinator
gemma@evaint.com

Charlotte Willis
Office Manager
charlotte@evaint.com

Parveen Raja
Publisher
parveen@evaint.com

Ian Tavener
Sales Manager
Tavener@evaint.com

Jordan Newton
Graphic Designer
jordan@evaint.com

Shobhana Patel
Head of Finance
shobi@evaint.com

Salam Raja
Producer
Salam@evaint.com

Kirstie Pickering
Editorial Contribution

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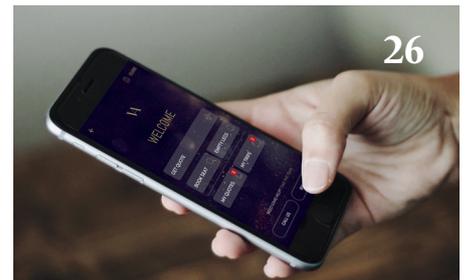
Poised to launch its bespoke helicopter charter business ahead of the first of the UK's major annual sporting events, London Stansted-based Heliconnex is feeling the effects of coronavirus lockdown, but Director Mark Hourigan and Head of Sales and Marketing Samantha Hazelgrove are redoubling their efforts, ready for the beginning of a new normality

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Epitomising business aviation operators, when coronavirus hit, ASL Group turned to global repatriation flights, and moving essential personnel and medical supplies. Nonetheless, ASL Group Safety Manager and pilot Maxime Wauters says the group is still planning for an exciting future

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Only a year into her business aviation tenure, Dori Henderson, Vice President Business Aviation & Digital Solutions at Collins Aerospace, believes her team has been extraordinary as it revises the company's digital solutions to satisfy the extraordinary requirements of the unexpected

hullo, Business as Usual

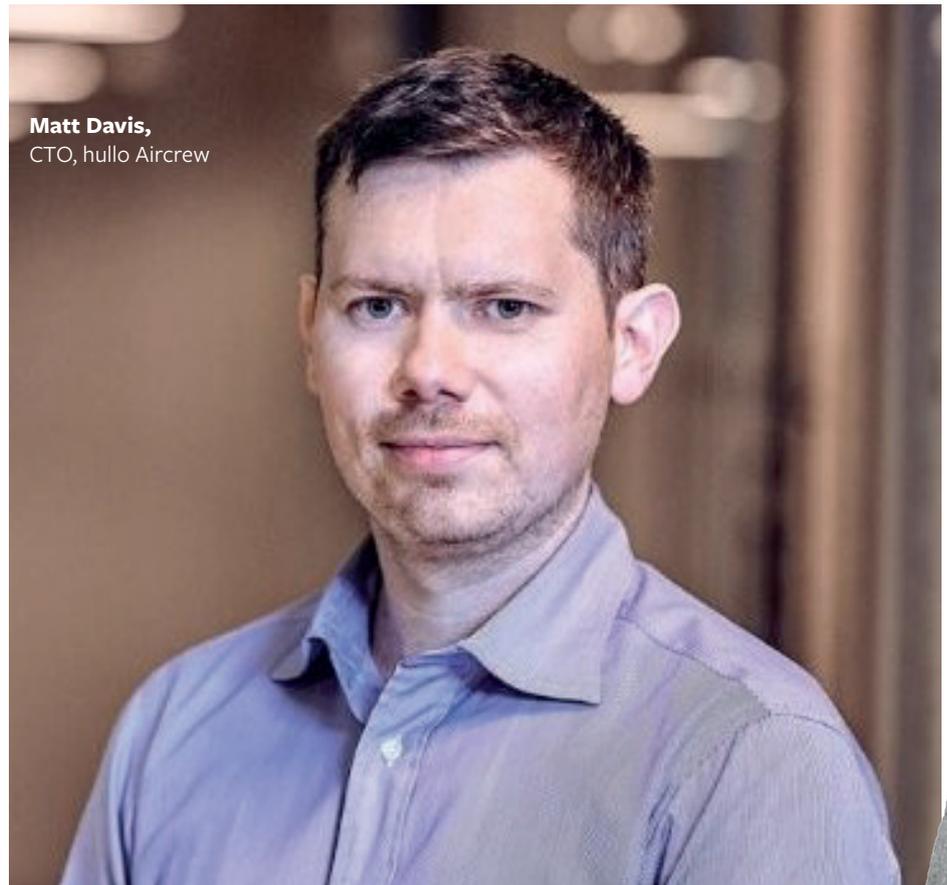
Crewing platform hullo Aircrew was established with homeworking in mind. The dispersed, digitally-savvy team behind the burgeoning system was therefore perfectly placed to continue as normal through the coronavirus pandemic

“hullo is dedicated to producing the best tool for freelancing in the aviation industry – it’s what we live and breathe,” says Steve Payne, Co-founder and COO, hullo Aircrew. “One of our core values is ‘joined-up thinking’, an ethos that’s enabled us to ensure the platform is always evolving in the right direction.” At its most basic, hullo Aircrew enables freelance pilots and cabin attendants to search for jobs, and operators to search for crew.

There are also ancillary benefits, including reduced-cost training courses, easily-shared documentation and simple billing, but always with an emphasis on efficiency and functionality. Payne notes: “We promote easy access to the data. Tech can become overcomplicated when it really should be simple.”

Now into its third year of operations, hullo Aircrew has enjoyed huge success, including a collaboration with Jet Aviation Staffing. Its rise to pre-eminence has been driven by the simplicity of the platform and otherwise general lack of technology in the crew-hiring space. Payne explains: “The use of technology in aerospace is very mixed. Some areas – avionics, flight planning, satcom, simulator training and augmented reality, for example – are on the cutting edge, while in others it is virtually non-existent.”

He identifies finding cockpit and cabin crew in business aviation as one of those back office tasks where technology was obviously lacking. “Crewing is a difficult, repetitive task. The process is slow and manual, causing larger overheads for little return on investment, especially since there is no central industry database. In the past, we’ve seen aircraft charter platforms like Avinode become intrinsic to the industry, but there



Matt Davis,
CTO, hullo Aircrew

was nothing similar for crew. The result was that people were still calling around the contacts in their ‘little black books’, and searching LinkedIn, Facebook and WhatsApp groups, where it can be very difficult to find the right audience.”

hullo Aircrew changes all that. “Users can search by the important attributes within seconds,” Payne enthuses. “Hundreds of crew can be contacted with a few clicks of the mouse and the coverage is global and always available. Cloud-based software and cutting-edge technology mean we never go offline.”

Flexible approach

Interestingly, the company culture is as strikingly different as the service hullo Aircrew provides. Steve Payne and Chief Technology Officer Matt Davis joined in a Zoom interview for this article, not because the office was closed and they were obliged to work from home, but because the company has been set up to enable homeworking. It was just business as usual.

“We’ve always had a flexible approach,” Davis confirms,

Steve Payne,
Co-Founder and COO

“Hundreds of crew can be contacted with a few clicks of the mouse...”

“so coronavirus hasn’t changed the way we operate. Cloud tooling is the key to homeworking, since it means the team can work from wherever they are, with access to all the company tools.” It’s an approach that also makes the company very nimble. “It means we can focus on solving problems, really well, and we’re able to move extremely quickly – we can turn new ideas into reality in days, rather than weeks or months.”

Payne compares hullo Aircrew’s mode of operations and tech employment to developments in the travel industry.

“Fifteen or twenty years ago, people would go to a travel agent and ask what holidays were available. Now they use any of several popular websites to find their holiday and compare prices, plus buy various bolt-ons, like car hire and insurance.

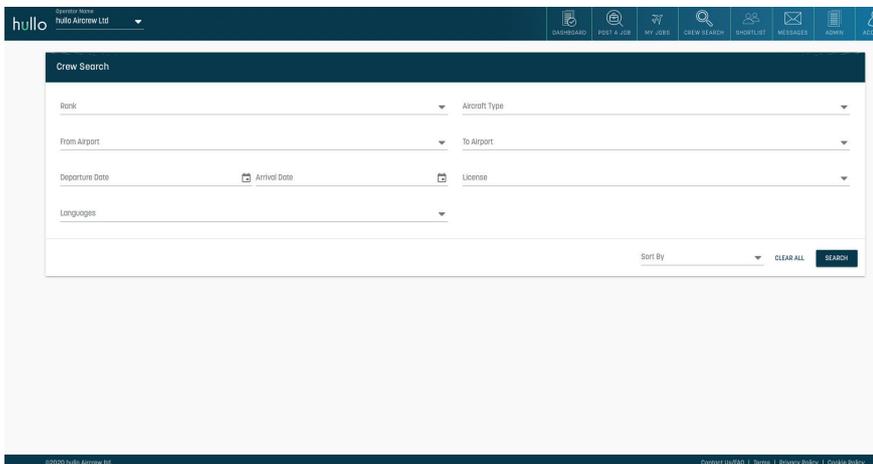
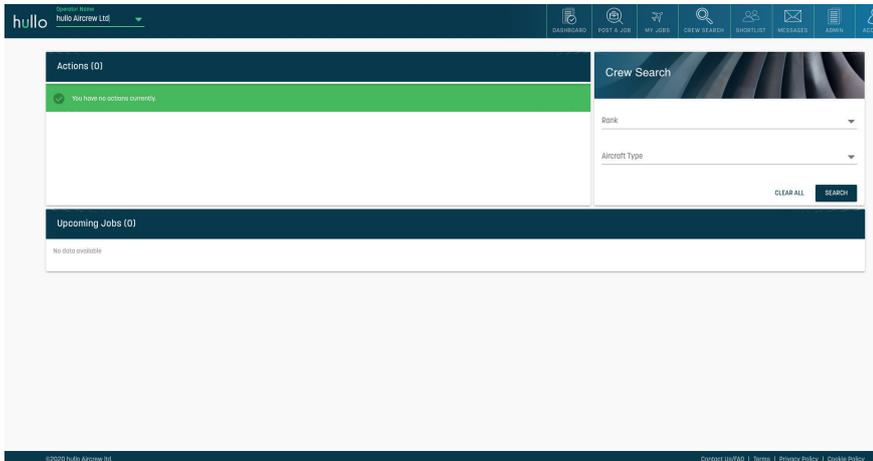
“We’re similar, but aviation is a very fickle industry and change management is difficult, because of the differences in regulation between countries. A major challenge for us, setting up, was creating software that would adapt to all parts of the world. We had a good grip on European regulations, but little experience in the US. That’s changed with the Jet Aviation relationship and the experience has led to changes in the platform that make it universal.”

Both home working and hullo Aircrew’s natural agility are serving it extremely well in facing today’s unprecedented challenges. “We had a period where nothing was happening, but since lockdowns, and rules and regulations have been lifted or relaxed in lots of different ways, we’ve seen the most difficult jobs coming our way. Because we have such a vast pool of crew at our fingertips, we can do very specific searches.

“The run-of-the-mill, ‘I need a pilot to go from A to B and back again’, isn’t happening at the moment. Instead, we’re getting requests as specific as, ‘I need a Chinese-speaking, American-licensed pilot in Australia, now’. We can find that pilot. We’re seeing lots of repatriation flights with families and companies that need to get someone back.

“On the other hand, we’re also providing costs for complete crews and then saying,

Steve Payne,
Co-Founder and COO



‘They’ll need to be in quarantine for two or three weeks after they fly and you’ll need to pay for their time in quarantine, for hotels, food and travel.’ Add all that to the charter itself and many people are baulking at the cost, but we are getting a few of those types of job in and they’re always quite complicated.”

Even during the first two weeks of May, Payne reckons the hullo Aircrew team noticed changes in the way aviation was employing technology. “I think it’s a defining moment. The industry is going to look at technology differently after all this.” Matt Davis notes that many companies, forced to furlough staff, are being obliged to look for more efficient solutions to support ongoing, albeit limited operations.

Sourcing crews is an obvious challenge and Davis says hullo Aircrew is an attractive option to companies whose crewing team has been reduced. “There’s been a general theme of global technology disruption through aviation, but the crewing aspect has been behind the curve, mainly because it’s an entrenched business with a traditional approach based on calls and personal networks.” Consider again Payne’s imaginary Chinese-speaking, American-licensed pilot in Australia; sourcing such an individual by traditional means would require many hours of phone calls.

No fees for crews

Freelance crew have also been exploring opportunities during the

pandemic and several have discovered hullo Aircrew. “May is looking like a record-breaking month for sign-ups,” Davis confirms. We’ve seen hundreds and we’re on track to beat our previous record, which resulted from a major publicity blast. Checking the platform regularly, I’m seeing the numbers constantly ticking up, it’s quite extraordinary.”

Freelancers are no doubt looking to maximise their employment potential once flying hours pick up, and the platform is particularly attractive because there’s no subscription to pay and only the operator pays a fee to hullo Aircrew when crew members are contracted. “We used to take a deduction from crewmembers,” Payne says, “but teaming with Jet Aviation caused a rethink. In the US, crews typically don’t pay a fee. We streamlined the system as a result, so that now only the operator pays a small percentage on top.”

With UK schools and nurseries closed, childcare has added an additional dimension to homeworking for both Davis and Payne, but neither has seen their working methods otherwise affected. “We all work from home, including our developers in the UK and Europe,” Davis says. “We meet up occasionally and we have calls, but mostly we communicate digitally, using Teams, Zoom and similar technology.”

“We like to think we’re a forward-thinking company,” Payne adds. “that means we have a relaxed attitude to work hours. So long as everything is done, there are no expectations of people being at their desk at nine and signing off at five-thirty. We strike a happy work/life balance, while recognising that hullo Aircrew has to be available 24/7/365. Again making best use of technology, we essentially have a ‘cloud office’ – we’re able to fully function from anywhere with an internet connection.

“Meanwhile, we’re constantly adding new features and improving the process. We like to look ahead at new tech and, for those reasons, the platform is always evolving.”

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Happier, Healthier, Humidified

CTT has been increasing cabin humidity levels and improving passenger comfort for many years, but Peter Landquist, VP Sales & Marketing, says its Inflight Humidification system can benefit the immune system too

Cabin air quality is a key enabler to passenger and crew well-being, especially on longer flights. The air's water content, simply expressed as humidity, is particularly important, especially since aircraft cabin air is, by nature, dry, and that of a business or VIP aircraft, frequently drier still.

Peter Landquist, VP Sales & Marketing at Sweden's CTT Systems, which specialises in cabin humidification systems, explains. "The humidity in an aircraft cabin is determined by the number of passengers and the environmental control system recirculation rate. So, for example, consider the ACJ320/BBJ737 cabins, which are sized for almost 190 passengers. The cabin of an A320/737 airliner with a 90% passenger load has in the region of 18 to 20% relative humidity. But in VIP configuration these aircraft might carry no more than 20 passengers and sometimes even fewer. Relative humidity in the cabin then plunges to below 5%.

"The cabin of a large VIP aircraft, without active humidification, is therefore an extremely dry environment. In fact, it's more dehydrating than any place on Earth. These extreme conditions have a negative impact on passenger well-being, causing discomfort that includes fatigue, jet lag, red eyes and dry skin, as well as negatively affecting taste, so that food has less flavour."

CTT's Inflight Humidification (IFH) system, previously known as the Cair System, is available for VIP aircraft ranging from the ACJ318 right up to the BBJ747. Surprisingly, when the company states IFH availability, it genuinely has designs finalised for all types in the range and Landquist says CTT can



Peter Landquist
VP Sales & Marketing, CTT

deliver a complete installation kit to any MRO undertaking conversion of a green airframe, or refurbishing an existing VIP aircraft. The only exceptions are the electrical and water drainage systems, which are the installer's responsibility.

Once fitted, an IFH system adds around 56kg to an ACJ320's weight, for a marginal impact on emissions. Aftermarket support is via Airbus subsidiary Satair, which is responsible for worldwide spare parts distribution, while repairs are supported directly by CTT or through its partners.

Humidity explained

Of course, although cabin humidity makes for happy passengers, it also has the potential for creating unhappy airframes. The IFH therefore includes a zonal drying (ZD) system. Landquist says: "A drying system is needed to balance humidity in the crown area [in the very top of the fuselage] to reduce condensation. The ZD system produces dry air with a low dew point, minimising condensation. It is activated as long as there is power on the aircraft, continuously introducing dry air into the crown area and creating a positive

airflow that prevents humid air from the cabin reaching the aircraft's cold skin and condensing. The ZD absorbs moist air, which is ultimately fed back into the cabin through vents between the ceiling panels, where it is mixed with cabin air and released from the aircraft."

System extent depends on the aircraft type and cabin zone configuration. "An A320 has two cabin zones, a Boeing 777 six," Landquist says. "Each zone has its own air supply, so that should the customer request a humidification system for the whole cabin, two humidifiers are needed for the A320 and six for the 777."

"The number of ZDs needed to prevent fuselage condensation is also determined by aircraft size and the number of zones to be humidified, but usually one ZD for the A320 and three for the 777. Most customers opt to have full cabin humidification, but some elect to humidify only specific zones."

Right now, as travellers in some parts of the world begin applying new parameters to their travel options, many are considering cabin air quality, especially in terms of potential pathogens, particularly carefully. While the benefits to well-being embodied in the CTT IFH are understood, Landquist says it also has a role to play in combating viruses.

"Higher humidity could be effective in reducing the risk of viruses spreading and being transmitted, as well as lowering passengers' vulnerability to them. The IFH system increases cabin relative humidity to a normal comfort level of around 22%, which may reduce the risk of catching viral diseases, like the common cold."

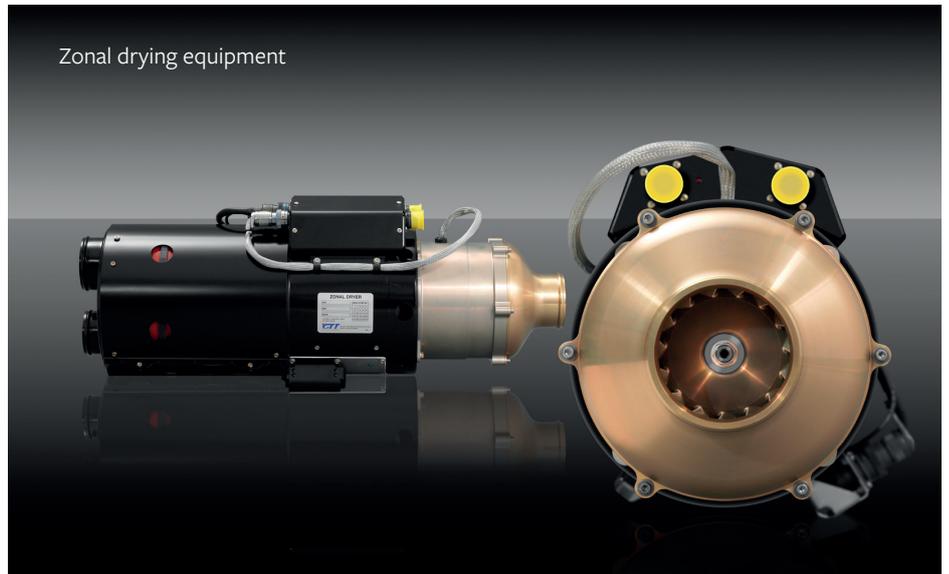
"Extremely dry air typically enables the spread and transmission of viruses. In a very dry atmosphere, droplets lose their water content through evaporation. The smaller droplets that result remain airborne longer, increasing the time during which spreading might occur. In an aircraft, this risk is mitigated by advanced, efficient air ventilation systems, but significantly higher cabin humidity is an additional measure that's effective against the spreading of viruses between passengers in a cabin area."

"Higher humidity also helps the immune system function more effectively. The human body is optimised for conditions on the ground. When the environment differs significantly from that 'normal', we're uncomfortable and our bodies work less well. Humidity is essential for wellness and for the immune system. Cabin air with almost no moisture content increases human susceptibility to viruses since it reduces the effectiveness of the mucous membranes. Mucous is an important component in our first line of defence against pathogens – not only does it contain antibodies but it physically catches and removes pathogens for destruction. Extremely dry cabin air dehydrates our mucous membranes, slowing

and perhaps even stopping this natural clearance system."

CTT's equipment is already widely installed on commercial and VIP aircraft but, Landquist says: "We are working continuously to improve our humidification system and, together with Airbus Corporate Jets, we are optimising it on the ACJ320 series. We're also evaluating the possibility of offering it to the business jet market." On which subject, given their exceptional range capabilities and large cabins, Landquist notes that the Bombardier Global 7500 and Gulfstream G700 "...are very interesting to us. They could certainly benefit from our technology."

Zonal drying equipment



Humidifier components



Big Ambition at Biggin Hill

Although Brexit was looming, F/LIST opened a new facility at London's Biggin Hill Airport in August 2019. The site had barely begun work when the coronavirus pandemic hit, but Managing Director Stefan Chevalier remains optimistic about the company's future in the UK

It is fortunate that F/LIST UK Managing Director Stefan Chevalier relishes a challenge. With some aviation service providers doubting their post-Brexit future in Britain, F/LIST boldly moved in, only to find itself working through the COVID-19 crisis just a few months later. Yet the irrepressibly upbeat Chevalier seems to be taking the unexpected in his stride and he's looking forward to expanding the UK business post-pandemic. He spoke to *EVA* late in April.

"We have our own hangar at Biggin Hill, located between two that Bombardier uses. Inside, we have a workshop and two spray booths – we rebuilt the hangar because it had previously been used only for storage." Chevalier describes the hangar's modification as a 'huge project', noting that he arrived on site only last August.

"For three months my focus was not only on construction and equipment installation but also on supporting our partner on site, and in December we started full production in the workshop alongside on-wing work. Our first Biggin Hill order came in at the beginning of the month and we were immediately into using the spray booths. We also have a second, fully-equipped shop where we work on soft goods – reupholstery, seat repairs, carpets and so on.

"We began hiring new, experienced people, but at the moment the staff of seven includes a 20-year old who's joined the business as a trainee. He's learning on the job and we'll also send him to Austria for more experience; we're expecting him to really grow from working alongside the other guys we have here and through learning all the products."

Biggin Hill Potential

With Bombardier building a new hangar at Biggin, Chevalier sees great potential for F/LIST at the Kent airfield. He emphasises that pre-COVID, construction was scheduled for completion in mid-2022 and though he's mindful about any predictions at the moment, he remains thoroughly optimistic; even the uncertainties of Brexit seem to have little impact on his enthusiasm.

Indeed, while others are considering the future of their UK-based businesses, Chevalier is busily establishing a new one. "When I decided to move to the UK, friends said to me, 'Most people are leaving the UK but you're going there, what's wrong with you?' I said, 'Look, Bombardier has undertaken huge development at Biggin Hill in the last three years and they see the demand for a quality on-site interiors partner. That's why F/LIST decided to come here. It doesn't matter what comes out of Brexit. So long as Bombardier is here, we're pleased to be next door.'





Two spray booths at the new Biggin Hill facility enable tasks including revarnishing.
All photos F/LIST, Gary Cooper

“Also, look at all the other business aviation companies around London. I think there’s huge potential for us but I also expect a good, long future with Bombardier; some customers are coming to them because F/LIST is on site, which is a huge benefit for them, and a win-win for both of us.”

The Bombardier connection is vitally important to F/LIST and will remain so, but Chevalier has already cast an eye towards future interior refurbishment requests in the region. The possibility of sending a mobile repair team to any other London business aviation airfield is also very much on his radar.

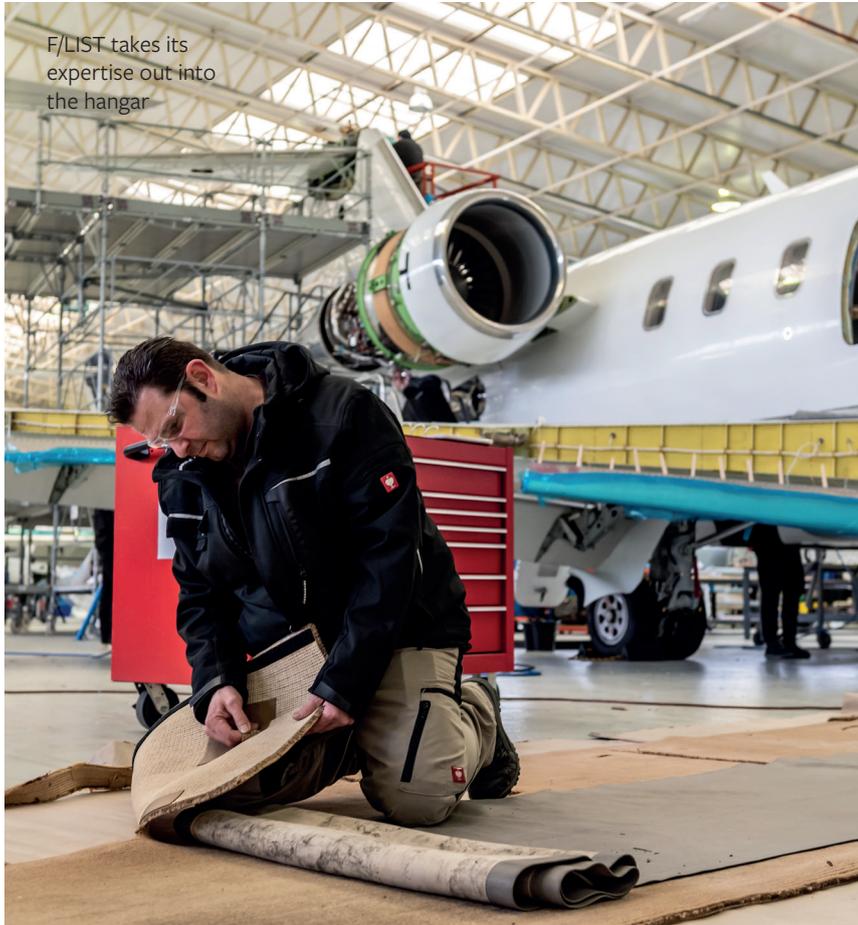
Challenging Conditions

Unfortunately, even unbridled enthusiasm isn’t sufficient to negotiate the myriad difficulties of working through coronavirus. Chevalier’s team was barely up and running when the pandemic hit. F/LIST UK has a small staff working in a spacious hangar, which

simplifies social distancing somewhat, but the situation remains tricky.

“We started slowly in December, but then saw maybe 100% growth every month, just through orders from Bombardier. Right now we don’t have sufficient manpower to keep up, because coronavirus means we’re not receiving support from our subsidiaries or from Austria. But the guys here at Biggin are doing a great job and I’m really proud of them; they’re working hard to cover all the work that’s coming in.

“Social distancing is still a challenge, although we’re lucky we can have two people working in the spray booths and someone else sanding parts ready for spraying, for example, but the greater difficulty comes from interacting with the Bombardier staff. The problems are with collecting parts and working inside aircraft. We have to define a scheduled for when Bombardier is in the aircraft and when F/LIST can have access.”



Stefan Chevalier

Managing Director, F/LIST UK

Stefan Chevalier explains: “My background is in aircraft engineering, but I later became a maintenance project manager, then moved into sales. I was a sales director for Hawker Beechcraft and then, around five years ago, stepped into interiors with a company in Berlin. A year later, it was acquired by F/LIST.”

Again managing projects, but also developing products, Chevalier heard of the Biggin Hill opportunity from his boss in Austria. “I was on vacation when I got the call and he asked me to apply and prepare a pitch in Austria. I got the job in May 2019 and on 8 August relocated to London.”

Starting with an empty hangar, he had the facility running three months later and less than a year after taking the job, he’s still looking forward to whatever Brexit brings while also coping with the effects of a global pandemic. Was there ever a moment, perhaps on walking into that storage hangar for the first time, when he thought: “Oh no, what have I done?” “No, because I had the vision in my head and I could see where the offices would go, where the spray booths would be. I never doubted my decision.”

With flying rates down, now might be the ideal time to place aircraft in maintenance, but Chevalier says he's seeing owners deferring. "They are concerned that the crew of an aircraft flying into the UK might have to go into quarantine for 14 days, which no one wants. It's not affecting our daily business, but may affect the bigger picture."

F/LIST Gateway

Meanwhile, the Biggin Hill workshop is set up to complete component repairs and refurbishment, and partial cabin refit, but Chevalier says it's more economical for full cabin projects to go to Austria. While Biggin's two spray booths are more than adequate for its needs, a complete cabin might require support from the Austrian headquarters.

Meanwhile, F/LIST UK is an excellent gateway into the company's catalogue. Customers interested in stone flooring or F/LIST's extraordinary wash basins, for example, may be able to have the items installed at Biggin Hill or investigate possibilities and requirements before investing. "I know every product well and it's always a pleasure to advise clients and provide recommendations," Chevalier says.

Local People

"I saw moving to the UK as a great opportunity and I have a fantastic team. I like to work with local people and so we've recruited locally. Initially I had some experienced personnel from Austria and Germany come over to provide training on the products. The guys here know what they're doing, but needed to understand the F/LIST range.

"Employing local people also means we give them the opportunity to grow with the company and I believe it's really important that we pass our specialist skills on to the next generation. Many people begin their careers as aircraft technicians and then specialise in the cabin, there's no real 'interior refurbishment' profession. So, I see us taking on more youngsters so that we always have someone new learning the skills. As a next step, I'm looking at how we can work with local colleges once we have the business properly established."

That future vision also includes plans for a presence actually inside one of the Bombardier hangars, plus more people on the payroll, greater capability and a wider variety of customers – Chevalier doesn't expect to remain dependent on Bombardier for work. Mobile repair teams could be an important component in this expansion. "Small repair jobs are really important, because when customers see

the quality of the work I'm sure they'll come back to us again."

All of which shows the determination of F/LIST and Stefan Chevalier to make Biggin Hill a success. Even in these unprecedented times, with an internationally recognised product line and the company's high-tech take on traditional craftsmanship behind them, Chevalier and the UK team have every reason to be optimistic.



Refurbishment work is often about skilled hand-finishing

I think there's huge potential for us but I also expect a good, long future with Bombardier; some customers are coming to them because F/LIST is on site, which is a huge benefit for them, and a win-win for both of us.

Pets on Jets

The process of flying by private jet is similar from any business and general aviation airport, but what happens when a pet is added into the equation?

Kirstie Pickering reports

Travelling with a pet on a commercial airline serves up a whole host of paperwork, box-ticking exercises and stress at the airport, but private aviation offers a streamlined route that means no pet has to be left behind.

The Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) allows pet dogs, cats and ferrets to enter the UK without the need for quarantine, so long as the animals meet the conditions of the scheme. Pets need a valid passport, must be microchipped and have had the required vaccinations to travel to the UK; all dogs entering the UK must have undergone tapeworm treatment, for example.

PETS has different requirements dependent on what country a pet and its owner are flying into the UK from. In addition to all countries in the European Union, the UK also accepts pet passports from 16 other European countries including Gibraltar, Martinique and Norway. Those flying from a listed country – among them Argentina, Taiwan and Fiji – can also fly to the UK with a pet passport.

Outside of EU and listed countries, authorised vets issue official veterinary certificates instead of owners needing to apply for a pet passport. This certificate allows a pet to enter the UK or a country within the EU. Owners and their pets must arrive in an EU country within ten days of the certificate being issued and it is valid for travel within the Union for four months. Pets from unlisted countries need to undergo a blood test prior to travel, before being considered for access to the UK.

Requirements for pet travel out of the UK vary from country to country, so owners need to check what paperwork is needed upon arrival at their destination before travelling. UK pet owners can take their dogs, cats and ferrets abroad, and bring them back into the UK without the need for quarantine.

Certain airports and FBOs are designated for pet travel and have specially-trained staff and facilities, including microchip scanners.

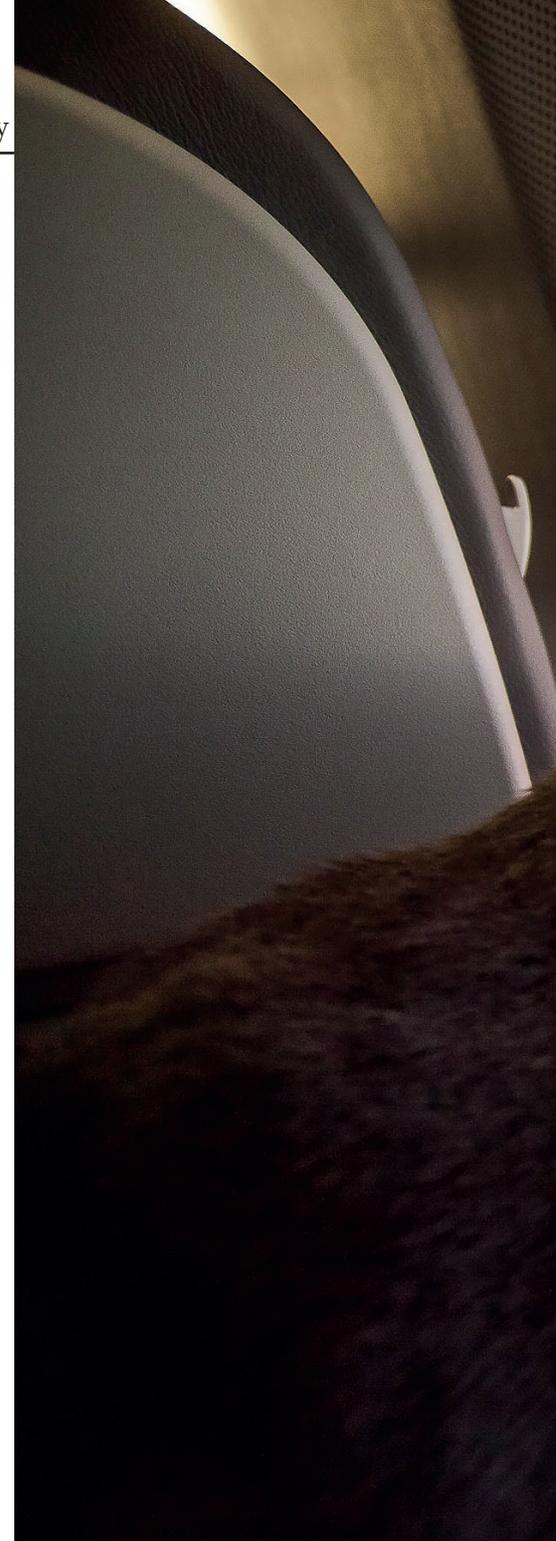
SkyPets

The number of flights with furry friends aboard continues to rise year on year globally, and London Biggin Hill Airport was therefore ahead of the curve when it established SkyPets in 2003. A team of specially trained pet handlers, SkyPets is based at the airport and enables Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) approved charter operators to fly owners with their pets directly to the airport for clearance.

London Biggin Hill was the first and remains the only business aviation airport within the London area to offer a dedicated animal handling service. On average, the airport clears around 2,000 pets per year for flights.

“On arrival at the airport, a member of the SkyPets team boards the aircraft to check the pet’s passport and microchip, without the pet ever having to leave its owner’s side,” says Sally Powell, FBO Manager at London Biggin Hill Airport.

“When passengers are travelling with pets to the UK via London Biggin Hill, they must provide SkyPets with details of the



pet’s passport, microchip and vaccination history at least 24 hours before travelling. On departure, the pet and owner can board the plane without a SkyPets coordinator, since no checks are required when leaving the UK.

“The clearance time at London Biggin Hill is considerably shorter than at Heathrow and Gatwick, and up to five pets can travel in the aircraft cabin with their owners,” Powell adds.

Oxford Pets

London Oxford Airport also sees its fair share of pets on board. During the summer months, the hub typically sees up to



50 flights per month with animals joining their owners. One flight even had a pet parrot aboard.

“We were one of the first business airports in the UK to get PETS approval,” says Amanda Kelly, Senior Customer Services Representative and PETS coordinator at London Oxford. “We have three dedicated staff members with the necessary expertise on the matter; they are also serious pet fanatics.

“We often see pets being flown overseas for breeding trips. Some fly – sometimes even

unaccompanied – abroad, get introduced to another animal of their type, and head home a day or two later.”

Menagerie Managed

And it’s not just cats, dogs and the occasional parrot that are welcomed aboard. Adam Twidell, CEO at global private jet charter broker PrivateFly, has welcomed a surprisingly high number of winged passengers aboard its jets too.

“The majority of our pet passengers are dogs – with cats in second place – but we have

arranged flights for a whole range of animals including ferrets, rabbits and birds of all kinds,” he says. “One memorable flight saw us transport a family’s two dogs, two cats and six pet birds (four pigeons, a cockatiel and a finch) from London to Alicante in Spain. The flight was seamless, if a bit noisy!”

PrivateFly’s client services team works closely with pet owners looking to take animals overseas, co-ordinating the operator, the airport, ground transport and all other parties to make sure the trip is as seamless as possible. In the summer months, around

10% of PrivateFly's chartered flights have traditionally had a pet on board.

"Pre-planning is essential to minimise stress and we work with the owner to do this meticulously, with a view to minimising delays, loud noises and other stress points," says Twidell. "We also advise the owner to ensure the animal has the comforts of home around them, such as their own blankets, toys, food and, most importantly, the owner themselves."

Pets need to be fully secured when airside at airports and also when inside the aircraft for take-off and landing. Aircraft operators will agree specific details for their aircraft with the relevant civil aviation authority prior to the flight, but very small dogs are typically expected to be safely secured within a carrier. Larger dogs will be allocated a seat on the jet and can be secured with the standard seat belt, although owners often supply a safety harness that can be attached to the belt for extra security and comfort.

Once they are aboard and safely stowed, the next stage is to ready pets for take-off. This can be particularly stressful for some animals owing to the sudden change in air pressure.

"Each animal is individual and can react differently to flying," says Twidell. "Generally, dogs are more relaxed than cats or other species. For cats that are particularly nervous, some owners like to use a calming pheromone spray or diffuser.

"During the flight, the main source of comfort is the owner, who can reassure nervous pets with their presence, and hold them or stroke them in the freedom and privacy of the cabin. This is the primary reason why some pet owners choose private aviation, when they wouldn't otherwise fly privately by themselves."

Streamlining the process of flying with a pet gives private aviation a niche advantage over its commercial counterpart. Despite the lengthy paperwork and organisation required to take a pet overseas, private jet passengers know that everything is taken care of before they even arrive at the airport, making it easy for the whole family, pets included, to travel.



PrivateFly works hard to ensure pets remain as relaxed as possible. PrivateFly



Jill Johnson is SkyPets coordinator at London Biggin Hill.

SALLY POWELL
FBO Manager, London Biggin Hill Airport

"The clearance time at London Biggin Hill is considerably shorter than at Heathrow and Gatwick, and up to five pets can travel in the aircraft cabin with their owners"



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Rotary Connection

Basing its VIP EC155 B1 out of London Stansted, Heliconnex is poised to expand its bespoke helicopter charter business, as Director Mark Hourigan and Head of Sales and Marketing Samantha Hazelgrove explain

After amassing 4,500 hours flying time, more than half of them as a military helicopter pilot with the Royal Navy, Mark Hourigan decided to start Heliconnex. Specialising in multiple aspects of rotary-wing operations, Heliconnex most visibly provides charter through its own VIP EC155 B1, but also offers a broad sweep of services to helicopter owners, from complete management packages to training advice.

Hourigan had exacting requirements for his helicopter purchase and the choice of an Airbus Helicopters' model was never guaranteed. "I bought the aircraft in 2019 after months of viewing and discounting other similar medium-sized helicopters, owing to material state and age," he recalls.

Eventually opting for the EC155, he says: "It suits the corporate role perfectly, with its great range and payload, and low cabin noise. Our aircraft has also been completely reupholstered in the cabin and cockpit. It looks amazing and suits the VIP expectation. The paint scheme has been completely changed to an Aston Martin grey, in a simple, non-branded way, keeping the helicopter very discreet."

Speaking with *EVA* as the coronavirus crisis worsened in late March, Hourigan confirmed that the EC155 was undergoing its annual maintenance package and CAA compliance checks. He was expecting it to become operational in April... "notwithstanding the impact of COVID-19 on the business."

Realistic and Resolute

Barely any aspect of what we used to regard as normality has escaped the ravages of coronavirus, but for Heliconnex, which ought to have seen its business take off this spring as the UK's season of major sporting events began, it might have been particularly devastating. Yet Samantha Hazelgrove, leading Heliconnex's sales and marketing effort, remains realistic and resolute.

"The cancellation of all sporting events and the suspension of Glastonbury to next year, with other events to follow suit, has had a huge impact on our industry. The UK helicopter charter industry relies on these events, which generate a lot of demand thanks to the flexibility a helicopter affords. With no events, there is no demand, and this affects the bottom line.

"We have ambitious plans for the business and yes, these are being hampered by COVID-19, but we are resilient and determined to come through the other side. We're working hard at getting the brand out in the marketplace and our aim is for Heliconnex to be at the forefront of people's minds when they consider chartering a helicopter.

"Our focus is very much on the corporate and VVIP client and we can tailor-make any itinerary to fit exact requirements, time frames and expectations. We'd also very much like to grow the management side of the business and hopefully expand the fleet in the near future."

For the time being though, Hourigan explains: "Heliconnex has engaged with the CAA and BHA [British Helicopter Association] to offer support to the nationwide requirement to airlift stores to where they are most needed. This is an exciting development that's very reminiscent of my military days. I believe the longer-term effects of the pandemic will last through the remainder of the year and with current government strategies developing, our helicopter is well suited to moving vital supplies around the UK and we're looking forward to demonstrating the flexibility and adaptability of our aircraft and staff."

Heliconnex Experience

Flexibility and made-to-measure charter is fundamental to the Heliconnex offer, but not unique among helicopter operators. So, what should customers expect from the Heliconnex experience?





Heliconnex's newly repainted EC155



The aircraft's cabin has been beautifully refurbished



Mark Hourigan

Director, Heliconnex

Director at Heliconnex, Mark Hourigan joined the Royal Navy in 1992 and graduated from Britannia Royal Naval College as an Aircrew Officer. After three years' flying training, he specialised as a Commando pilot from 1995, flying the Sea King HC.Mk 4.

The Commando Sea King's primary role was to provide amphibious support to the Royal Marines in all theatres of operation, including desert and arctic environments. "Most of my operational tours of duty were in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Iraq," he says, "during which I amassed 2,500 hours, many of them on NVGs [night-vision goggles] in tactical scenarios. My commission ended in 2009.

"Then I started an aviation consultancy and also flew commercial helicopters in the UK for four years. I flew privately for a further six years as a contract pilot, before expanding into my own helicopter charter business with Heliconnex. In total, I have 12 aircraft types in my logbook and 4,500 hours of flying, but sadly no more on NVGs."

Hazelgrove explains: “The helicopter is based at Fayair’s excellent Stansted FBO, and Heliconnex can therefore easily provide connections from/to bizjets using the airport. Even if the bizjet uses another Stansted facility, the helicopter can taxi to pick passengers up or drop them off airside, or we can arrange for a smooth ground transfer.

“We personalise client itineraries to afford bird’s-eye views of amazing landmarks, we fly customers to fine dining restaurants, including Le Manoir in Oxford, provide a memorable day at the races, or create the opportunity for a day out in Paris, the possibilities are vast.

“And, from a business rather than leisure point of view, a helicopter is ideal for clients visiting multiple sites in the UK. Large distances can be covered in a much reduced time frame, enabling several site visits to be accomplished in one day. This is the sort of itinerary where a helicopter charter is hugely beneficial to the client.”

While echoing Hazelgrove’s thoughts on charter, Hourigan also describes Heliconnex’s wider business. “Our helicopter management includes all aspects of aircraft ownership, from purely operating on behalf of the owner as a private service, through adding the owner’s aircraft to the charter fleet under a leasing arrangement, to complete end-to-end bespoke aviation management services, including importation, regulation and compliance for clients buying and selling their helicopters.

“There are lots of moving parts and we prefer to take full operational responsibility for all of the aircraft, structuring bespoke packages for individual owners. These frameworks present unique challenges, but the team at Heliconnex offers professional services and advice on all aspects of owning and operating helicopters, including engineering, continuous airworthiness, safety, piloting and training.”

Returning to Heliconnex’s own helicopter, for which the registration G-HCNX has been reserved, Hazelgrove explains: “The EC155 B1 is an advanced aircraft from the renowned Dauphin family, designed for optimum speed and luxuriously appointed with a redesigned cabin. For an aircraft in the midsize category,

its flat-floor passenger cabin is massive – 235cuft – plus it has more luggage space, at 88cuft, than you’ll find in some midsize jets.

“Our passenger configuration provides an unrivalled level of comfort. With its luxurious leather interior, G-HCNX can seat six passengers comfortably, plus another in the front when the helicopter is crewed by one pilot. The cabin is very quiet and our two ‘captain’s chairs’ have proved a hit with VVIP clients, since they reflect the first-class travel experience. Smaller aircraft, including the AW109, don’t have this space and certainly won’t be as fast or as comfortable.”

Aston Martin Meteorite Grey

G-HCNX has recently undergone an exterior refurbishment, about which Hourigan and Hazelgrove are very excited. The COVID-19 crisis unfortunately means few photographs of the transformed aircraft were available for this article, but Hazelgrove enthuses: “When it came to the colour choice, it had to be simple and discreet, but with an air of sophistication and elegance. Aston Martin Meteorite Grey delivers all this with a cool edge, appealing to our most discerning clients.”

Although she remains upbeat, Hazelgrove is obviously looking forward to the return of business as normal, or at least the new business of normal. The EC155 B1 will

undoubtedly be kept busy on VVIP special event charters in and around London and beyond, but some clients will certainly appreciate not only its long range, in excess of 400nm, equivalent to a flight from Southampton to Inverness, but also its ability to cover distance quickly.

And Hazelgrove says its versatility is expanded further, since it is ideally suited for operations into and out of tight spaces, including the decks of superyachts. “Being twin-engined and IFR-equipped, it is also capable of night operations and flying in adverse weather,” she says.

Such a combination of flexibility and performance enables Heliconnex to rival bizjet operators on some connections, a fine example being London to Paris. Departing Battersea Heliport, without the requirement to transit out of the city to an executive airport, G-HCNX can then land direct in the centre of Paris, eliminating the journey in from the destination airfield.

“Time is very often a critical factor to our clients,” Hazelgrove says, “and an important consideration in trip planning. When it comes to the UK, the helicopter’s versatility pays real dividends. Clients are not restricted to airports – they can even depart from their garden if they have the space to do it.”

Samantha Hazelgrove

Head of Sales and Marketing,
Heliconnex

Samantha Hazelgrove, of Hazelgrove Consultancy, is working on behalf of Heliconnex, leading its sales and marketing efforts. A graduate in Business and Marketing from the University of the Sunshine Coast Queensland, Australia, she worked in the travel industry for more

than 20 years, the last 11 of them in business aviation.

Her aviation career began at Hawker Pacific Sydney in 2009, before she returned to the UK in 2011. “Since then, I’ve worked in the fixed-wing and rotary worlds, as well as heading up sales and marketing for an overflight and landing permit app,” she says.

Having experienced the operator and broker perspectives, Samantha understands the demands and expectations of private aviation clients, and wants the Heliconnex brand to be the first people consider when they need VVIP helicopter charter.

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Safety, Security, Service

The coronavirus pandemic has hit the French Riviera airports at Nice, Cannes and Saint-Tropez hard. But Joseph Azzaz, Directeur, Aéroport du Golfe de Saint-Tropez, says new lessons are being learned, ready for a safe return to operations

As spring turns to summer, the Aéroports de la Côte d'Azur airports on the French Riviera at Nice, Cannes and Saint-Tropez, would normally be moving into their busiest time of year. That same period in 2020 inevitably has them managing as best they can under severe travel and operational restrictions, but managing nonetheless, and looking forward to a new future.

Aéroports de la Côte d'Azur owns and manages all three facilities, delivering handling activities under its Sky Valet brand. Created in 2013, Sky Valet ensures a consistently high quality of service, since the Sky Valet FBOs and airports belong to the same company.

Now Directeur, Aéroport du Golfe de Saint-Tropez, Joseph Azzaz moved to the airport after six years managing Sky Valet's Cannes

FBO. He describes the company's Cannes airport operation: "We run the airport, the hangars and the handling. All aircraft types up to 35-tonnes maximum take-off weight are welcome, so long as they are compliant with noise regulations."

Although relishing the challenge, even in peculiar times, of his new position at Saint-Tropez, Azzaz is proud of his time at the Cannes FBO. "I became manager there in 2014 and every year the quality of our handling services was placed among the top FBOs in industry surveys. Cannes offers ramp, customer services and crew facilities, and a crew car is always available. Sky Valet's Cannes FBO was certified IS-BAH Stage 1 in 2015, the first European facility to achieve this landmark. In 2017 it became the first to gain IS-BAH Stage 2 certification." Sky Valet service provision at Saint-



Tropez, which Azzaz describes as an ‘iconic destination’ is similar, but with the addition of AFIS (aerodrome flight information service) capability.

“The airport enjoys overwhelming support from all the cities in the Golfe de Saint-Tropez,” Azzaz says, “the local authorities working closely with airport management to help develop its activities while taking into account the need to reduce noise and pollution.

“Most of our customers live in the Golfe de Saint-Tropez area. They are frequent flyers throughout the year, but we usually experience a huge amount of extra traffic during the summer. In addition, our helicopter operations are extensive, with most flights from the airport to homes or yachts.”

With many years’ shared experience behind them, Sky Valet’s agents have a deep understanding of their mission and what’s required to achieve it. Azzaz also reckons: “Our customers and crew members appreciate that they are always welcomed on the ground by familiar faces. It’s their guarantee that they will receive tailor-made service that exceeds expectations.”

Of course, the COVID crisis is causing some expectations to change and forcing operators to look at new ways of doing business. “We are taking every measure to safely welcome passengers and crew,” Azzaz says. “Our spacious facilities mean we can easily accommodate social distancing and all the other requirements of safe services. We will get through this crisis and be resilient, defining and applying new protocols under the mantra ‘Safety, Security, Service’.”

Shining in the Sun

With its focus on the airports at Cannes and Nice, Clean Jet Azur has boosted its trusted business with a new disinfection product. Commercial and Technical Director Bruno Philippon explains

Aircraft cleaning is among those important services at one time easily taken for granted, but now assuming a critical role in passenger and crew safety. Based at Aéroport Cannes Mandelieu, Clean Jet Azur offers a suite of cleaning options covering the interior and exterior of a multitude of business and VIP aircraft types.

Bruno Philippon, the company's Commercial and Technical Director, says it began trading in its current form during 2010, after an earlier institution of the same name was purchased and completely re-equipped. Clean Jet Azur was reborn that February and Philippon says it expanded rapidly to claim a large proportion of the business at Cannes and Aéroport Nice Côte d'Azur.

Paying careful regard to its environmental responsibilities, Clean Jet Azur operates a fleet of specialised, optimised vehicles for maximum efficiency. The application of vehicle-based machinery to the outside of an aircraft is easily envisaged, but the company also boasts a fully-equipped carpet cleaning vehicle. "Cleaning with various detergents, the system doesn't require us to place equipment inside the aircraft. We have a variety of products for removing different stains and all our detergents are certified for aircraft use too," Philippon notes.

Beyond dry cleaning or shampooing carpets, Clean Jet Azur's offering includes what Philippon describes as 'standard cleaning', covering all cabin surfaces and the galley, leather upholstery and cabin disinfection, plus other services in response to client requests. Now more than ever, disinfection is vital and Clean Jet Azur has plenty of experience in the field, having been

disinfecting cabins against the Zika virus since 2016. In addition, Philippon says: "In February 2020 we moved to a new aircraft-approved disinfectant product that kills 99.99% of the most harmful bacteria, fungi, mycobacteria and viruses."

Clean on the Outside

Exterior cleaning includes rinsing with purified water. Again, a special vehicle is used, equipped with six large filters enabling it to produce its own clean-water supply. Philippon says Clean Jet Azur treats all types of private jet and helicopter, inside and out, but the largest aircraft it regularly sees are the Global 5000/6000 and Gulfstream G650.

"The biggest exterior cleans we've done are on the ACJ319 and Boeing 737-700." Its largest interior projects include the A330 and Boeing 747-100, while the smallest was a Citation Mustang.

The fact that customers Clean Jet Azur began working with in 2010 remain regular says much for its work. At the same time, the company is always ready to react to ad hoc requests, with a daily focus on satisfying emerging customer requirements as quickly as possible. But day-to-day operations aren't quite as simple as just cleaning aircraft, as Philippon explains: "We also maintain our equipment and our remit goes beyond aircraft, since we also take care of hangars and private yachts. And although the focus of our aircraft work is Cannes and Nice, we sometimes travel to other airports in the Côte d'Azur."

During the first half of April, aircraft movements at Cannes and Nice had almost ceased, but Philippon was able to report that among Clean Jet Azur's many services, disinfection was particularly popular for the few visiting jets. "We remain ready to respond to customer requests at any time and expect to restart work proper just as soon as we can."



The company prides itself in the quality of exterior finish it achieves



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Challenging Reality

Vertis Aviation offers a personal, bespoke charter experience, but has also proven adept at a variety of challenging COVID-related missions. Chief Operating Officer Catherine Buchanan, locked down in her Dubai home, talked to EVA about the company's 'new reality'

Achieving global presence with a small, dedicated team, Vertis Aviation was founded in Switzerland in 2010. It takes pride in delivering the highest standards of bespoke service, marketing five exclusive jets on behalf of their operators – a Challenger 350, a Falcon 900EX EASy, a Global 5000, a Global 6000 and a recently added Embraer ERJ145 – and boasting the capability to rapidly source whatever aircraft type the client or trip requires, all provided with a complete concierge-style support package.

Based in Dubai and previously Vertis CCO, Catherine Buchanan fully stepped up into the Chief Operating Officer (COO) role on returning from maternity leave in October 2019. It's a fact that says much about the company's partners, Jeffery Emmenis, Erica Da Veiga and Julian Burrell. They recognised Buchanan's talent and ensured her career progression on her return. This enlightened attitude to personnel, and the business, pervades the Vertis operation.

New Role

Explaining the difference between COO and her previous role, Buchanan says the CCO position had already given her a global perspective on the business, but now she's taking a more operational, business-focused interest. "It's a multi-faceted role, taking in business strategy, targeting, budgeting, making sure we're running efficiently, working with the sales team in a mentorship role, and being involved in PR and corporate communications. "One of my initial tasks as COO was hiring an internal digital communications manager, primarily because we see digital marketing as the future."

It is an unfortunate fact that industry executives, often aviation lovers before they came to work, or hooked by aviation once they'd started, tend to spend less and less time with aeroplanes as their careers develop. Speaking during COVID-19 lockdown in early April, Buchanan was pleased to report that during 'normality', her trips to the airport

were still quite regular. "One of our key strengths is that we offer a very personal, bespoke and consultative product and that involves us going to the airport, seeing clients off and ensuring everything goes perfectly."

She's normally a regular flyer between Dubai and Switzerland. "That's stopped for now, but we all work online all the time anyway. I'd say we're quite a progressive, dynamic company, in that we have flexible working conditions. We recognise that instead of spending hours on end in traffic jams to get to offices, it's sometimes more efficient to work at home. It means we're used to remote working, and well prepared for the actual reality that we're facing now. Having face-to-face video meetings with colleagues in Los Angeles, Ireland and Switzerland is just part of a normal day for me."

Today's Reality

While some business and VIP aviation providers have chosen to shut down until



the unprecedented market conditions have abated, others see continued, albeit different operations, as the way forward. Predictably, Vertis has continued. “It wouldn’t make good sense and neither would it be a viable option for us to just shut down,” Buchanan says.

“We’ve had to turn our hand to different areas of general aviation. We’ve been working on repatriation flights, medevac and cargo, as well as chartering as normal in those areas where it’s possible. We’ve actually been busy and the challenge has been really interesting. Repatriation flights aren’t simple, for example. There are essentially two types, governmental, which are probably more obvious in what they involve, and then the personal flights.

“In those, the client is paying for the flight and the operation is very complex. As an example, we had a Chinese family who wanted to get their children back from Europe. We booked a flight and within 30 minutes the regulations had changed and they could no longer go to the airport we’d planned. We changed to a different airport, but then that one locked down. In the end, we flew them to Cambodia and then on a commercial flight home. With the situation so fluid, we’re having to be very reactive. Thinking outside the box is becoming the norm.”

The COVID-19 crisis is creating conditions in which the unique capabilities of private aviation are showing their mettle, but

Buchanan is typical of industry leaders in seeing its exceptional achievements as little more than an extension of business as usual. After relating the story about the Chinese family, she reveals that her own lockdown conditions mean she requires a permit to travel beyond her front gate. Many of her colleagues were also working under various restrictions and yet Vertis safely and speedily reunited a family across half the world. Only business aviation gives geographically spaced individuals working from their own front rooms the tools to reach out across continents and bring people home. “It’s incredible, isn’t it?” Buchanan agrees, after a few moments’ thought.

We are all celebrating and looking with new respect at hitherto unrecognised categories of frontline worker – healthcare providers, truck and delivery drivers, supermarket staff and others. Buchanan is quick to recognise the dedication of crews operating repatriation flights. “Across aviation, we have people putting themselves in harm’s way to provide service on board an aircraft. It’s incredible, absolutely frontline work.”

Vertis Operation

Aside from the jets it exclusively markets, Vertis offers brokerage over a wide variety of aircraft depending on client needs. “If we can’t satisfy their needs from our aircraft portfolio, we’ll sub-charter. The fact that at the moment we exclusively offer predominantly Bombardier types is



Catherine Buchanan

COO, Vertis Aviation

A lifelong aviation enthusiast, Catherine Buchanan began flying gliders at an early age, before working a weekend job in exchange for flying lessons from the age of 15. An aviation technology and management degree followed, with a PPL(A) soon after.

She joined Vertis Aviation from Royal Jet in 2013, initially as Middle East regional manager. Three years later she became CCO, before taking the COO role from October 2019.



Vertis exclusively markets
this Global 5000



The Global 5000 cabin



Another Vertis exclusive, a Falcon 900EX

“We’re paying the contributions ourselves, ensuring all our flights are offset...”

has to go through the ARGUS policies manual and our internal manual, then we offer digital training sessions, which everyone does at the same time as much as possible – sometimes it’s difficult to make it work over all the time zones. Every Monday we have a team briefing with everyone on a conference call – it’s seven in the morning in Ireland, 11.30 in India and 11pm the day before in Los Angeles. It’s difficult, but it means everyone gets the same information and everyone is on board.

“We do still have offices, but Vertis is a dynamic and progressive company and we already recognised the benefits of remote working. I feel we’ve spearheaded it over the past decade, while many other people are just coming around to thinking about it because of the pandemic.

“It’s all typical of Vertis. It invests in people, recognises their talent and hones it, and makes it possible for them to stay with us and progress.” Buchanan confirms there was much to learn for her new role. “There’s a lot of continuation from my old role, but the whole business element and the physical running of Vertis Aviation and the financials behind it were new. I had training sessions to get to grips with them all. But there are always new things to learn in this industry and I think the minute you think there aren’t, that’s when you fail.”

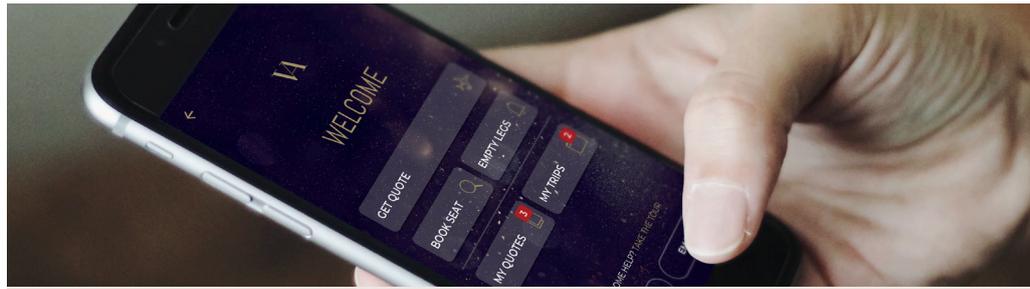
coincidence; our portfolio varies as owners sell or move their aircraft. Having said which, I have noticed a preference in Europe for Bombardier and in the US for Gulfstream. We’re looking to extend our portfolio to include some aircraft in the US and, based on those preferences, that’s likely to include Gulfstream.” As an ARGUS-rated broker, Vertis is heavily audited and implements an

exhaustive sub-charter process that ensures its own standards are matched even outside its exclusive aircraft.

Perhaps not unusually in business and VIP aviation, Vertis operates globally with a relatively small staff. Communicating online is therefore essential, but digital training is also critical. “Anyone joining the company

Among the company’s latest developments, Footprints is a carbon-offsetting programme launched in March 2020. It’s a typically unusual take on a familiar idea. “We’re paying the contributions ourselves, ensuring all our flights are offset, but we’re also asking clients if they’d like to make an additional contribution. Then, on a monthly basis, we’re donating money to charities and causes that are particularly important to our clients. Because we’ve been flying a lot of repatriation flights from Africa, in our first month we decided to donate to Doctors Without Borders, which is completely aside from carbon offsetting, but we felt it was the best place we could put our money.”

Footprints is a typically diverse, outside-the-box solution from Vertis Aviation’s small, versatile team. Buchanan says: “The diversity in our client portfolio is incredible. We move customers and their friends to sports events by King Air and work the whole spectrum up to heads of state. I believe it’s our consultative process, knowledge and confidentiality that bring people back to us again and again.”



New Appreciation for Digital Booking Platform

Released at last year’s EBACE show, the Vertis Aviation App had attracted in excess of 100 sign-ups by July 2019, the majority of them in the US. Proving particularly attractive to those looking for ad hoc charter, the app was achieving around a 10% success rate for enquiries becoming bookings.

At the time, Vertis Aviation Chairman Julian Burrell said: “We have seen that customers still want the boutique characteristics of the company but are also valuing the convenience of being able to search for charter from their own mobile

devices when it suits them.” That’s turned out to be a prophetic statement.

Since the COVID-19 lockdown began, Catherine Buchanan and her team report that the app’s steady growth rate since May 2019 has spiked. They believe it shows more potential clients, some of them possibly new entrants, are coming to the market place as people adjust to managing more of their life digitally. It also suggests that customers are keen to return to flying and Vertis is optimistic for a busy, evolving post-pandemic future.



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An in-house app sits at the centre of Euro Jet's operation



Ready for Anything

Euro Jet provides support services throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. Busily adapting to and working through the COVID crisis, the company is looking forward to further expansion

Managing a large team from its Prague headquarters, Euro Jet is no stranger to remote working. Nonetheless, when COVID-19 disrupted just about every plan for every article in this summer 2020 edition, it was typical of the company's can-do, will-do attitude that Director of Global Sales and Marketing Gareth Danker took the reins and coordinated his colleagues' responses to the editor's questions.

Euro Jet specialises in providing support to VIP and business aircraft operations, but also has expertise in airline, cargo and military flying. In fact, it offers an unfathomably broad range of capability, ranging from full-blown FBO down to individuals at remote airports. The organisation is arranged by location, as Danker and colleagues explain.

Euro Jet has 'core' and 'global' locations. How do they differ?

We have a direct presence in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Middle East



and Central Asia. We call airport locations in these regions ‘core’, since our own people are present, along with elements of our network of offices and crew lounges, usually in the general aviation terminal. At ‘global’ locations we offer support through a network of long-term partners.

How has the geographical distribution evolved? Even considering just the core

“Each core country has a Country Manager who oversees a team of Ground Service Coordinators.”



Euro Jet has a number of VIP lounges, including this one at Tirana, Albania

locations, Euro Jet must have a large staff – how do you ensure consistent service standards across so many employees at multiple airports?

Yes, we have a large workforce! Euro Jet was founded in 2008, dedicated to providing ground support services throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and Asia. Since then, we’ve expanded throughout these regions as we’ve gained local knowledge and learned the specifics of each key airport. Unlike Western Europe and the US, there are very few FBOs, so we invest in people on the ground to coordinate our services; before Euro Jet, true VIP service was difficult or impossible to deliver.

Each core country has a Country Manager who oversees a team of Ground Service

Coordinators. All our representatives are fully trained internally and have NATA Safety 1st certification. We also have continuous training and evaluation throughout the year, ensuring our teams are performing to the highest standards.

What infrastructure do you have?

Our ground support network contains 13 crew lounges and offices at Prague and Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic; Tirana, Albania; Sofia, Bulgaria; Dubrovnik and Zagreb, Croatia; Tivat, Montenegro; Warsaw, Poland; Bucharest and Constanta, Romania; Belgrade, Serbia; Poprad, Slovakia; and Kiev, Ukraine. Since it houses our headquarters and main base, at Prague’s Vaclav Havel Airport we have a full FBO, cars for crew and passenger transport, a heated hangar and ground handling equipment.

An internal app seems very important to Euro Jet’s operations. How does it work?

A smartphone-based tool used by our ground coordinators in every location, the app helps keep track of aircraft movements and services provided. For instance, when an aircraft lands, taxis and as the door opens, our representatives tap a button on the app, time-stamping each event. The time stamp is immediately visible at our Prague operations control centre and available to the customer, keeping them constantly updated. Personnel

“...at Prague’s Vaclav Havel Airport we have a full FBO, cars for crew and passenger transport, a heated hangar and ground handling equipment.”

on the ground continue tracking other events, including catering being delivered, crew and passengers departing and returning to the aircraft, and its eventual departure, in just the same way.

You offer a bewildering array of ground services. Are they delivered by Euro Jet personnel, or do your representatives arrange them through their knowledge of local companies and regulations? What do you expect of your obviously talented people?

Euro Jet Ground Service Coordinators in our core territory supervise all operations, with most services delivered by local partners. Our people have profound knowledge of their airport, and at some locations we also offer a crew lounge, an office or ramp cars.

The vast majority of our staff are highly experienced aviation professionals and most have been with us many years. As a minimum, all speak fluent English as well as the language of the country where they are based. Long-term partnerships with vendors outside our core territory means we can guarantee similarly high levels of service globally.

You handle executive and VIP aircraft, cargo, airliners and military aircraft, all of them with quite different, exacting demands on ground services. How do you satisfy them all?

We oversee more than 10,000 operations every year and our agents have experience supporting all kinds of flights, even though each is unique. The teams at different locations are in frequent contact, sharing knowledge, expertise and best practices.

We’ve also built extensive experience supporting diplomatic flights for summits, conferences and the rotating EU presidency, which generates increased diplomatic traffic. And we’ve supported flights for sporting events, including the Ice Hockey World Championships and UEFA European Championships.

What types of job do your representatives most often handle?

The most common jobs are also among the most important –



Euro Jet reconfigured quickly to continue operations during the coronavirus pandemic



ensuring crew and passengers pass through security as quickly as possible, getting them to the aircraft, making sure their catering is delivered and that special requests have been taken care of before departure.

What's the most unusual job you've done?

Nothing is really unusual because we're always ready for anything. We did once babysit a set of eagles though. We've also returned lost wedding rings, driven around town looking for a specific type of drink, and gone to hotels in the middle of the night to load hundreds of bags because our customer was short staffed.

Euro Jet also specialises in supporting aircraft delivery flights. It seems an unusual capability – does it mean you work closely with brokers and OEMs?

We work with all the major aircraft manufacturers and their representatives, and brokers, assisting aircraft movements for delivery, shows or other related activity. These flights tend to be less complicated because there is typically only the crew on board, although extra work is often required to help customers with new aircraft.

The Prague operations room is monitoring COVID-19 advisories and restrictions, and informing customers

“We oversee more than 10,000 operations every year”

how they affect individual flights. How is coronavirus affecting your customers and your business?

We've been closely monitoring the situation since its beginning. We hadn't seen significant change in the business until mid-March; as Europe became the epicentre of the pandemic, borders were closed and travel restrictions implemented.

Our dedicated team of analysts immediately began collecting and updating data on travel limitations and restrictions, enabling our ops team to provide customers with up-to-date information and ensure operations continued successfully.

Euro Jet's daily business has shifted with the evolving situation. We've seen a decline in business aviation, but increased our support of humanitarian, repatriation and cargo flights, and medical evacuations. Our unconditional priority remains the safety and health of our customers, partners and employees, so most of our office-based staff are working from home, while our Ground Service Coordinators out on the ramp are carefully following all recommended safety precautions. Once the situation improves and travel restrictions are lifted, we'll be ready to quickly return to business as usual.

What's Euro Jet's plan for the future, once we're through the worst?

Our vision is to continue developing the core locations where we have a direct presence and strengthening our partnerships throughout the global network. The company has expanded significantly over the past 12 years, but we remain focused on our ultimate goal of ensuring every customer becomes a long-term partner.

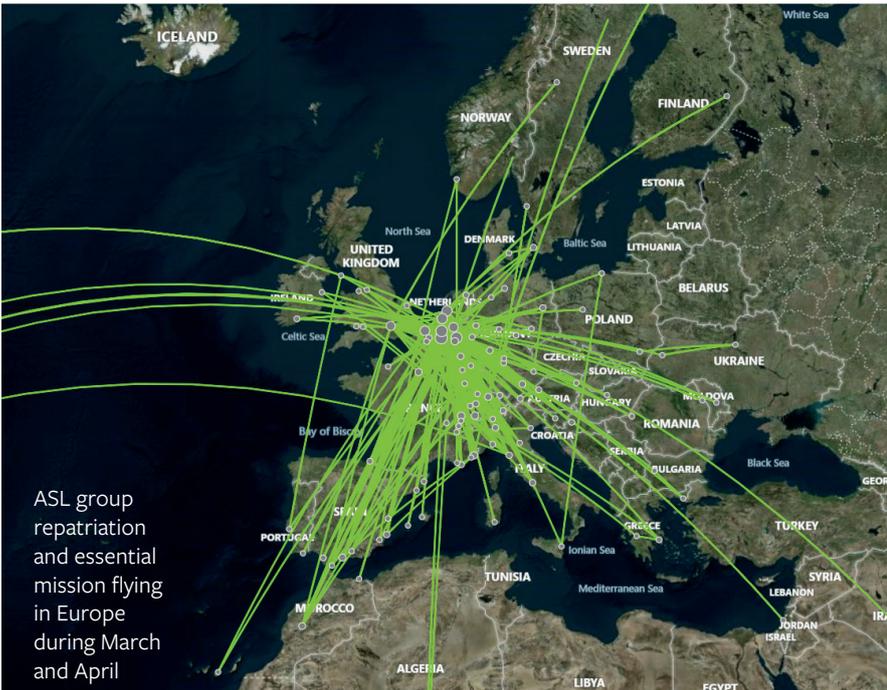


The heated hangar at Euro Jet's Prague Vaclav Havel Airport headquarters



Big Plans, New Future

When coronavirus hit, ASL Group quickly turned its talents to moving essential personnel and supplies, and repatriating those stranded abroad. But, as ASL Group Safety Manager and pilot Maxime Wauters explains, the group still has a keen eye on the future



Based in Belgium and the Netherlands, ASL Group operates a fleet of more than 40 business jets across its ASL Private Jet Services and JetNetherlands brands, plus single examples of the ERJ135 and ERJ145 with ACE, its corporate airline, which are now also offered under the ASL Fly Executive banner. Like so many industry stalwarts, as its regular flying declined with the spread of coronavirus, so ASL began applying its expertise to new, often life-saving missions.

Maxime Wauters, ASL Group Safety Manager and pilot explains: “During March and April we operated repatriation and other ‘essential’ flights, including medical missions and moving healthcare personnel, to 116 cities in 34 countries, carrying more than 1,200 passengers. We’ve flown to Florida, New York, Norway, Turkey, South Africa, Morocco and many other locations.”

Fast expanding and forward leaning, the ASL Group regularly adds new aircraft to its portfolio and Wauters says other growth plans are continuing as far as lockdown allows. “We still have big plans for the future and we’re working really hard on our ‘pre-COVID’ projects while preparing for the restart of ‘normal’ operations ‘post-COVID’, although timings are very uncertain. We know the effects of the crisis will be felt for a very long time and it will take months, if not years, for the global economy to recover. But we are confident that business aviation will bounce back fast and strong.

“We’re expecting a couple of new aircraft to join the fleet and we’ve started construction on a hangar and general aviation terminal at Liege. We’re also working on a very important sustainability and ecology project.”

But the recent focus has been on combating coronavirus, moving medical supplies and personnel, and repatriating citizens stranded abroad. Demonstrating the versatility and can-do attitude that typifies business aviation, the ASL team even turned its hand to chartering freighters.

“If our clients need something we don’t have, we find it. One of our shareholders had contacts in China and our team used their expertise in rapid problem solving to charter four Boeing 747 freighter flights and import millions of masks and other medical supplies to Liege,” Wauters reveals.

Repatriation Challenge

Meanwhile, he describes repatriation flying as ‘quite challenging’. Crew and passenger safety inevitably comes first. “Even before the pandemic was declared, we started taking proactive measures to protect our crew, staff, clients and passengers, ensuring the highest levels of safety and hygiene. Safety is always our most important commitment, but we immediately began implementing additional cabin cleaning and disinfection measures, initially based on EASA recommendations and subsequently on directives.

“We also adapted our operations to include only one-way flights and short turnarounds, we began avoiding night stops in affected areas and equipping all our aircraft with disinfection products and universal precaution kits, hydroalcoholic solutions, masks, gloves and so on. And then, as well as the EASA directives, we have been strictly following all the recommendations from governments, health institutions and other authorities. Our office personnel are working from home and those who have to work on site – including ground ops and maintenance staff, and crew members – are following all the social distancing, handwashing and other recommendations.”

Yet safety has not been the major challenge. “Most of our repatriation flights come in as last-minute requests from direct clients, governments, official agencies, embassies or brokers. The biggest challenge is to ensure each flight can be completed. Countries have implemented a wide and varied range of confinement measures, in a somewhat haphazard way, and sometimes these aren’t clearly communicated, making our planning very complex.”

Repatriation flights are one-way by nature; in simple terms, that means around half ASL’s recent flying has been empty. “So we decided to offer these flights to medical staff,

NGOs, government officials and diplomats directly involved in the fight against the COVID-19 outbreak,” Wauters says. “All empty leg flights are posted on our website, communicated through platforms including Avinode, and to our most important brokers.

“One of our more significant flights was at the beginning of the pandemic, when we moved a team of nurses from the UK to Gibraltar to support hospitals coming under pressure from the outbreak.” By mid-April, however, the pace of repatriation flying had slowed and ASL’s operation was reducing as a consequence.

“It’s difficult to know what to expect, since there is so much uncertainty. We don’t know when or how the market will develop or when borders will completely reopen. We also have no idea how long some level of restriction will remain in place, or when airports and airspace will become fully operational again. And, because every country is managing its crisis response differently, with little or no international coordination, it’s difficult to say even when we’ll be able to begin limited operations.”

Yet Wauters remains confident for the future.

“We believe that owing to the nature of our business and our industry, which are based on reactivity and flexibility, we’ll be ready to operate fully again almost immediately, unlike our friends in the airline sector. We might even see a surge in demand for private jets, both from ‘new’ customers looking for more privacy and less potential exposure to crowds, at least for as long as the virus is still a serious concern, and primarily business customers, who really need to travel but can’t use the airlines yet because of their slow restart. At ASL, we are making sure that as restrictions are lifted, even gradually, we’ll immediately be ready to serve our clients again.”



Maxime Wauters

ASL Group Safety Manager and pilot

Maxime Wauters began his flying adventure on gliders around the age of 14 or 15. After graduating high school he started airline pilot training in Belgium, only to find himself working at the flight school for something like nine years, ultimately becoming Chief Marketing Officer and Safety Manager.

“I always wanted to combine a flying career with a management function,” he recalls. “Back then, I was already aiming for a career in business aviation. I’d always thought it a very attractive, fascinating sector and after my career at the flight school, I joined ASL Group in 2014.

“I started out as a safety officer and marketing manager, while simultaneously flying the Cessna Citation XLS+. Shortly after that, I upgraded to the Embraer Legacy 450/500 – now including the Praetor 500 and 600 models – and took the position of Safety Manager for the Group’s Belgian and Dutch AOCs.”

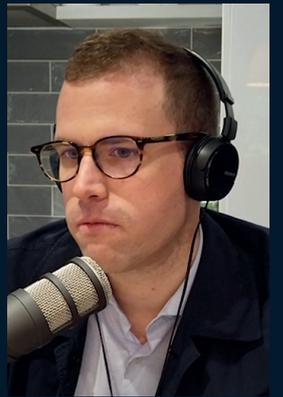
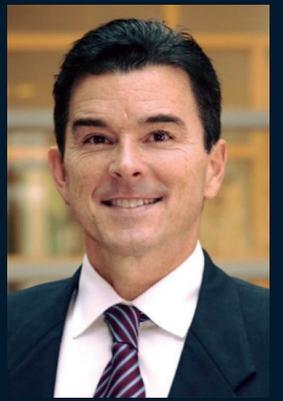
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Time, to Tow

Combining simplicity and convenience, the AVTRAC is new low-cost, electrically-driven aircraft towing unit from the UK's JES Machinery. Company owner Jason Gardner explains its potential

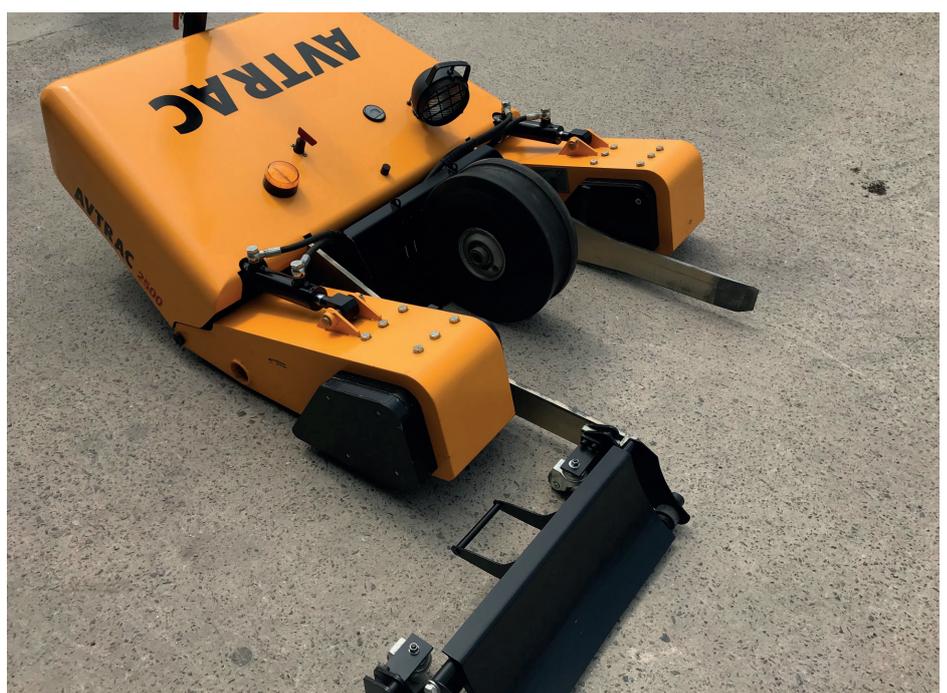
Very little in aviation appears simple. Aircraft tend to be complex by nature, demanding intricate procedures for their safe operation and comprehensive technical support and specialist equipment for maintaining and moving them when they aren't in the air. Since the majority of business jets are on the ground for many more hours than they fly, safe, efficient ground handling is an important, yet easily overlooked aspect of operations.

Electric aircraft tugs are not new, but few are as simple to operate and maintain as the AVTRAC from JES Machinery. It's a pedestrian-operated machine that JES owner Jason Gardner says is ready to run 'out of the box', and so intuitive that users are comfortable with it after no more than an hour's training.

Capable of moving aircraft weighing up to 10,000kg and compatible with single- or twin-wheel nose gear without modification, the AVTRAC uses a 'scoop' system that gently lifts the wheel from front and rear. The aircraft tyre is held just a few centimetres off the ground, while a manually-actuated locking rear gate ensures the nose gear remains securely engaged throughout the movement process.

AVTRAC Origin

Gardner is predictably enthusiastic about the product, but so are his customers, among them Chris Beer, Director of XLR Executive Jet Centres, which has FBOs at the UK's Birmingham, Bournemouth, Exeter and Liverpool airports. "When we were setting up the newest addition to the XLR Jet Centre group, at Bournemouth, we needed a versatile, lightweight piece of GSE capable of towing smaller business jets around our parking ramp. We trialled the AVTRAC and





The AVTRAC's rear gate is opened before the machine is manoeuvred up to the nose undercarriage wheel. A wheel mock-up shows the correct positioning. The gate is then closed and the wheel 'scooped' up. The gate locking mechanism is activated by the aircraft's weight and accidental release is therefore impossible while an aircraft is engaged. The gate is activated, locked and unlocked manually, reducing complexity and cost

found it completely changed the way we would normally move aircraft; it meant we could control the tow more precisely and move aircraft safely at low speed. The price was very reasonable for the capability and within ten days we'd taken delivery and had the equipment in use."

Other operators have reported easy compatibility with the PC-12, where some tugs struggle, given the limited clearance between the aircraft's propeller and hangar floor, while the AVTRAC also lends itself to smaller business jets equipped with shorter undercarriage legs. Proving its capability further, the AVTRAC has even been tested against the Hawker Hunter T7, a training version of a 1950s' fighter jet weighing around 8,000kg and featuring a particularly awkward gear door arrangement.

On the other hand, versatile and cost effective though the AVTRAC is, Gardner explains that it came into the JES portfolio through a convoluted route and if it is to see the global success it deserves, then a distribution partner is the logical next step.

"We were approached by a GSE company that had seen the original AVTRAC concept and wanted to add it to their product line.

We agreed to manufacture it for them and redesigned it ready for sale. But then the company reorganised and decided the AVTRAC didn't fit into its revised portfolio. I'd invested heavily in the redesign and now I was left with a great product, but suited to a market that JES had never expected to serve."

Since JES understands the AVTRAC intimately and specialises in manufacturing, the baseline product is also highly customisable according to customer requirement. One potential operator asked for a longer handle to provide further improved reach, for example, while Gardner says the unit could be scaled to suit lighter or heavier aircraft too. Finishing the AVTRAC with operator logos or customising it with corporate colours is also easily achieved.

The AVTRAC has been designed for simplicity and Gardner says the focus was always on achieving maximum efficiency at a low price point. "The operator needs to crouch down and close the rear gate behind the nosewheel, for example," he says. "We've been asked if that can be automated. Of course it can, but it adds cost and complexity." He has so far resisted building a remotely-controlled version for the same reason but, again, says it could be done.

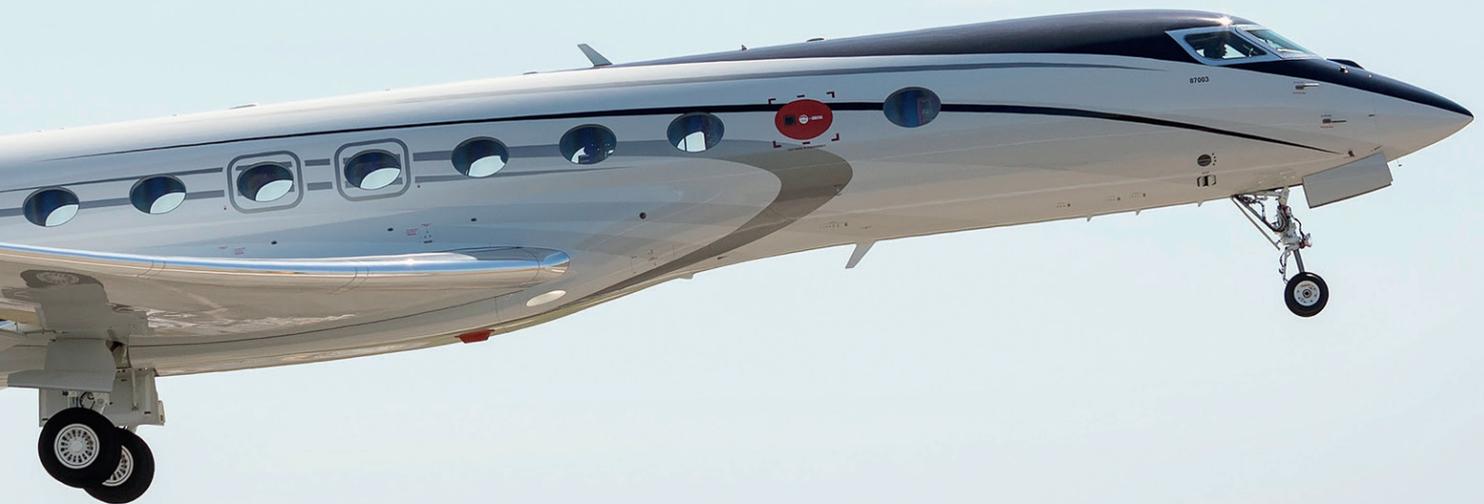
"Also, we've built the AVTRAC using off-the-shelf components. That's why the electronic control panels are from Curtis Instruments and any problems therefore easily fixed, although customers find the unit very reliable."

Looking to the future, Gardner believes JES is well placed to manufacture the AVTRAC for a global audience. "Curtis Instruments is a US company, which means replacement electronics are easily sourced. We manufacture most of the AVTRAC ourselves, which means we have control over replacement parts. Under the right agreement, we could also supply drawings to other engineering shops, or kits of components for repairs or even complete units."

For now, Gardner finds himself in an interesting position. The AVTRAC is proving itself an excellent machine in daily service with UK bizjet operators and at least one owner pilot operating a piston aircraft from a home hangar. It offers an ideal basis for bespoke modification, requires little maintenance and comes at an attractive price, but Gardner recognises that if AVTRAC is to move into the global market place, then finding a partner ready to provide international sales and training support is the essential next step in its development.

Pandemic Journey

As the final words for this summer edition of Executive & VIP Aviation International were typed in late May, many business aviation companies were struggling for survival. Others were managing to continue the fight while simultaneously reinventing aspects of their operation to support medical authorities and charities, or return those stranded abroad home. EVA spoke to seven organisations about their own pandemic journey



The third flight-test G700 took its maiden flight on 8 May. Stephanie Lipscomb/Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation

Gulfstream: Business (almost) As Usual

Gulfstream flew its second G700 flight-test aircraft for the first time on 20 March, following up with its third jet on 8 May; three days later, the company announced EASA type certification for the G600. These are busy times at Gulfstream, which has worked hard to keep its staff safe and well.

The Savannah-based OEM says it has implemented social distancing measures, established on-site temperature screenings and provided employees with PPE, increased the frequency and intensity of facility and aircraft cleaning, and encouraged employees to stay home if they feel unwell. A strong partnership with the FAA means that where appropriate, regular Webex meetings have enabled document reviews and other discussions.

With three trials vehicles flying, the G700 flight-test programme has not only continued without delay, but actually gained momentum. First customer delivery in 2022 is still the goal, while flutter testing, envelope expansion and dynamics of flight, and other trials, are continuing at pace.

The aerospace sector has responded quickly and decisively to calls for help from medical and government authorities and Gulfstream is no exception, donating 10,000 pieces of PPE and other items. Protective suits, masks, gloves and hand sanitiser have come from company stocks, while 3D-printed supplies have included surgical mask tension-release bands. Almost US\$100,000 in funding has also been given to non-profit

organisations, while a request from General Dynamics sister company General Dynamics Land Systems, led Gulfstream to produce more than 50 ventilator mask adapters for a clinical trial in Canada.

Elsewhere, for Gulfstream's customer support network it has been business almost as normal. Following Centers for Disease Control and World Health Organization guidelines on social distancing, PPE and facility and aircraft cleaning, the company has continued servicing and supporting the global Gulfstream fleet, while many customers have taken the opportunity to have the OEM's service centres perform scheduled inspections and planned maintenance.

JetClass: FlightPooling for Everyone

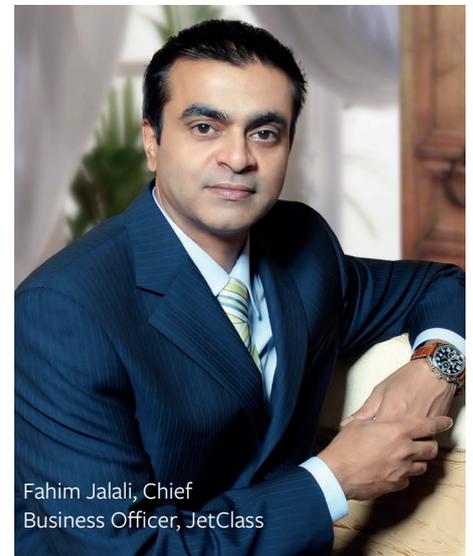
Vienna-headquartered JetClass describes itself as a private business airline. Using powerful data analysis and AI tools, it enables passengers to book seats on private jets for the same price as a business class ticket on a scheduled airliner, but charges no membership fees. With 300 shared and 1,000 private charters behind it, the company has already proven its model, but as Chief Business Officer, Fahim Jalali explains, the coronavirus pandemic caused a rethink. The result was FlightPooling, a non-profit charter sharing concept launched on 4 May to help those with essential travel needs during the crisis, but with obvious potential for the future.

“Devising a viable travel option for the masses who need to travel today, we wanted to find a solution that had the potential to outlive the corona epidemic, in that its principles and benefits should remain favourable to the general public indefinitely. While currently non-profit, the FlightPooling option has the characteristics to appeal to people based on the new travel culture of avoiding larger airports and, where possible, widebodied

aircraft. Judging by the feedback we've been receiving, the market is enthusiastic about FlightPooling's future.

“For now it is very much a one-way service – we don't wish to encourage non-essential travel by creating return trips at present. It is essential people appreciate the tool and service as a means of securing urgent travel and use it accordingly. We've already received enough subscriptions to some destinations to take action and we're working on flights involving Dubai, Male, Delhi, Auckland, Zurich, London and Milan.

“FlightPooling was created to help everyone, regardless of their financial situation. We were adamant the initiative would be not-for-profit and that we would aim to create a solution for every subscriber if we possibly could. This means using various sizes of aircraft depending on the request. For example, we received a 100+ passenger group request for a long-haul flight on a large jet, while at the same time speaking to a small family hoping to fly intra-Europe with their pet, on a small jet. We'll aim to execute both



Fahim Jalali, Chief Business Officer, JetClass

flights with an equal level of consideration given to health and safety while appreciating that one client may be financially more flexible than the other.

“Through FlightPooling, we hope we will emerge in the aftermath of this awful global tragedy knowing that we did all we could, when we could, as best we could.”

On Air Dining: Equipped to Care



Suddenly finding himself with just a handful of daily flights to cater for, On Air Dining CEO Daniel Hulme put his Farnborough expansion on temporary hold (at the time of going to press it was due to reopen imminently), furloughed several staff and then looked around to see how he could put the company's perishable food stocks, expertise and vehicle fleet to good use helping others through the pandemic.

With the business working solely from its Stansted headquarters, Hulme talked to his regular suppliers and secured fresh stocks at favourable prices, enabling the remaining On Air Dining team to create quality hot meals for no more than £5 per serving. Aside from having the right staff and refrigerated vehicles to hand, On Air Dining had the advantage of its specialist aircraft catering business, which meant custom-designed packaging was readily

available; the company was quickly supplying much-needed meals.

Hulme is covering costs including manpower and delivery, and an On Air Dining JustGiving page is helping cover the cost of the food – by mid-May it had raised £800 and the team was hoping additional donations would enable a weekly donation to those in need locally. Speaking in early April, Hulme revealed: “We’re supporting a charity in Nottingham that works with orphaned and high-risk kids, and supplying other charities we’ve been working with for a few years. With those, we’ve been feeding around 150 homeless people on Christmas day, plus we produce meals for some really vulnerable old people who only get out once a month. Anything we’ve got left after these and the Nottingham children is pumped into our local NHS [National Health Service].”

Osprey Flight Solutions: Open for Business

Osprey Flight Solutions fuses real-time information, technology and industry leading expertise to deliver advanced aviation risk analysis to business, commercial and government aviation customers. It covers a spectrum from rapid alerts through real-time reporting to fully customisable reports that are accessible instantaneously and up to date to the minute they are produced.

A global pandemic might, therefore, be a time for the Osprey team to sit back and wait for the work to come in. But instead, while new clients are undoubtedly finding their way to the company's door and the crisis will reveal to others the importance and quality of Osprey's work, thoughts at the Hampshire HQ have turned to helping the aviation industry weather the storm.

First and foremost, Osprey has launched Osprey:Open, a free, map-based platform providing layers of regularly updated global aviation security data, customisable by the individual user.

The subscription includes a daily email alert summary and ad hoc critical alert emails, and will remain free in future. As a big-picture resource, it is probably unsurpassed. The company is also offering free webinars, with informed safety and security comment from industry experts in the wake of COVID-19, and offering a comprehensive programme of security and pandemic updates via social media.

Chief Commercial Officer Bruce Norfolk explains: “Osprey:Open launched in March this year, and the concept behind the platform was to enable a cross-industry improvement in risk management. We've continued to develop how :Open covers the COVID-19 pandemic, including adding related NOTAMs and biosecurity measures – data that is so critical to the industry during these challenging times.

“Osprey:Open remains completely free of charge and anyone in the industry can register to gain access to this crucial data.”



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TailHail: Launching a Charter Challenge

While many companies are struggling and others adapting to the COVID-19 crisis, very few are starting anew. This does not seem the time for start-ups, yet TailHail, an online membership-based charter platform that CEO James Moon says, "...will allow any individual, group or businesses to find, book and fly on a private jet at accessible and affordable prices," is doing exactly that.

Moon admits that the timing is in part because the launch process had gained too much momentum to stop, but also that the evolving, extraordinary global situation represents an emerging opportunity. "I've been working on TailHail for many years and secured investment earlier this year to get it off the ground. I believe we couldn't be launching TailHail at a more opportune time. Timing is everything in business and more people will want to fly privately after the crisis."

TailHail's launch is, indeed, fresh. During the few weeks in which Moon and *EVA* corresponded, the company's website evolved considerably, albeit to a standard Moon described as 'basic', with completion expected in July or August. "In phase two later this year, on the back of a hopefully successful series-two round of funding, we will roll out our app, which will put us and our customers in a league of our own given the technology we'll be employing."

Moon says that within 24 hours of the holding website going live early in May, he'd received six enquiries and several emails asking about the cost of chartering. "We haven't even begun our marketing yet and based on this early response I'm looking forward to marketing the TailHail brand and carving a niche in this very competitive space. We know it will be tough, but I think the team and our technology will offer something a little different."

By mid-May, charter proposals were already with clients looking to fly with TailHail. "It's very exciting," Moon says, but "...we're starting small so we remain flexible in the current environment, with a view to raising investment to support technology developments later this year and begin the process of obtaining a Type B AOC, so that we can manage aircraft on behalf of owners. I feel that sector has yet to enter the 21st century and it will be great to cause positive disruption. Through my aircraft sales experience, I'd also like to still be able help to those who prefer to own rather than charter."

But there are already several charter apps and membership schemes on the market, so how is TailHail different? "There are a lot of platforms out there, some of them fantastic," Moon declares. "But we want to be different.

We don't want to rely on one part of the business fuelling our brand, that's why we plan to move into aircraft management and sales. And, we know aircraft very well, we aren't just a tech company."

TailHail looks ready to grab a share of an emerging post-pandemic market for private flying, a market Moon expects to persist. "It won't just be an initial rush and then gone. I believe habits and buying motives for flying have changed for good. Health is at the forefront of every decision and will remain so for a good three to five years at least; besides, why would you go back to flying on a crowded airliner after flying privately?"



James Moon, CEO, TailHail.
Jacob Lawrence

VistaJet: Global Focus

The epitome of global business aviation, VistaJet began reacting to the emerging pandemic as the first coronavirus cases were reported late in 2019. Since then, it has introduced a range of evolving procedures and precautions to keep its passengers and personnel safe.

Working closely with its partners, including Osprey for risk control and assessment advice, and MedAire for medical support on the ground and in the air, VistaJet

has implemented twice-daily checks for symptoms among its crews and stringent procedures for passengers. Meanwhile, cabin cleaning processes have been enhanced and aircraft are subject to what VistaJet calls 'a full sanitisation cycle'. Further cleaning and treatment are completed at crew request should the presence of someone exposed to coronavirus be suspected.

Recognising that some customers might prefer a dedicated aircraft over the short

term, VistaJet also implemented Dynamic Jet Lease, providing a jet and crew, stationed at the closest available airport, for a period of one, two or three months.

As well as keeping those customers who wish to and are able to travel on the move, VistaJet has employed its global infrastructure to assist governments and medical organisations, while offering complimentary empty legs to repatriate citizens and transport critical supplies and doctors. In a March press release, VistaJet founder and chairman Thomas Flohr said: "We know we don't normally offer repatriation flights or the transportation of medical equipment but, ultimately, we are a logistics company and we are here to help the global community as much as we can. We are in this fight together."

Up & Away: Demand for Disinfection



Stefan Murphy, MD and owner, Up & Away

It should come as no surprise that specialist aircraft valeting and cleaning company Up & Away has seen cabin disinfection become its primary focus. Its first booking for the service came in on 27 February, some weeks before the UK went into lockdown. By mid-May, the company had completed in excess of 700 disinfections, Managing Director and owner Stefan Murphy confirming that around 70% of these had been on business aircraft.

Blessed with admirable foresight, Murphy made an early, significant investment in equipment and PPE, which means his staff remained safe as demand ramped up.

He says nothing about the process of disinfecting a cabin has changed, except that operators have begun to take the requirement seriously and want cabins treating after every flight.

Social distancing has meant reducing staff numbers on board, but Murphy says: “Most customers understand the extended times needed to complete a job due to the smaller teams. Meanwhile, we are open and it’s business as usual across the whole operation.”

The crisis has seen Up & Away’s customer base widen to include cargo aircraft, police helicopters and air ambulances, the latter an easy extension of its regular VIP helicopter work. Murphy reports: “Prior to COVID-19 we were gearing up for a very busy year. We’d just secured a new contract with NetJets and our business aviation fixed-contract activity had grown to around 70 aircraft on fixed monthly fees. We also added bases at London City and Manchester Airports, and had increased staffing levels by 50%.”

Alongside his existing bases at Doncaster, Leeds, Luton, Farnborough, Biggin Hill, Oxford, Prestwick and Stansted, Murphy had planned to add up to four new bases in Europe this year. “This is still very much the plan,” he says, “but we’ll revisit it in 2021.”

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Bart Kroonenberg
COO
Tel. +31 653 765 332
bart@aviaco-gse.com




Extraordinary Business, as Usual

Collins Aerospace has been revising its digital solutions to satisfy the extraordinary requirements of the unexpected. Dori Henderson, Vice President Business Aviation & Digital Solutions, spoke to EVA

Towards the end of April, global business aviation flying was typically down by between 50 and 70% compared with last year's figures for the same period. With its suite of digital solutions, including the ARINCdirect Flight Operations System (FOS) and flight planning products well established, this considerably reduced demand ought to have barely taxed Dorothea Henderson, Vice President Business Aviation & Digital Solutions, Collins Aerospace, and her team.

In fact, they've been busier than ever. She says the coronavirus pandemic has created a proving ground for all Collins Aerospace connectivity and digital products and while they continue to perform exactly as advertised, she and her team have been reacting to requirements of critical importance that they could never have envisaged, even just a few months ago.

"When the coronavirus crisis began we were bombarded with questions from our customers. 'Where can we fly? We've heard this airport is closed.' 'We've heard we have to fly around this country, can you help us?' It was overwhelming. There was no one place they could go for the information.

"One of the first things we did was set up a 7/24 COVID customer help desk. Since then, we've been learning more and improving the digital toolsets we are providing. We realised early on that our customers needed to understand travel restrictions and, within days, we'd added a graphic overlay on the map of our iPad app, for example, showing COVID-related travel restrictions. It means that as pilots file a flight plan, they can see exactly where restrictions are and react appropriately. That wasn't in the toolset before. It was in response to the customers' overwhelming desire for data around what they could do.



For us, it was about giving pilots more and more information, so they could focus on the safety and security of the aircraft. We've been updating COVID NOTAMs on our website every five minutes too.

"We've needed to spend Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on innovation

meetings, focussing on the challenges we're facing every day and seeing how we can tweak our toolset and how we provide services in response. We're looking at how to help customers today and what this will all look like during recovery and what new needs they'll have then. This is going to change the face of both business and commercial aviation."



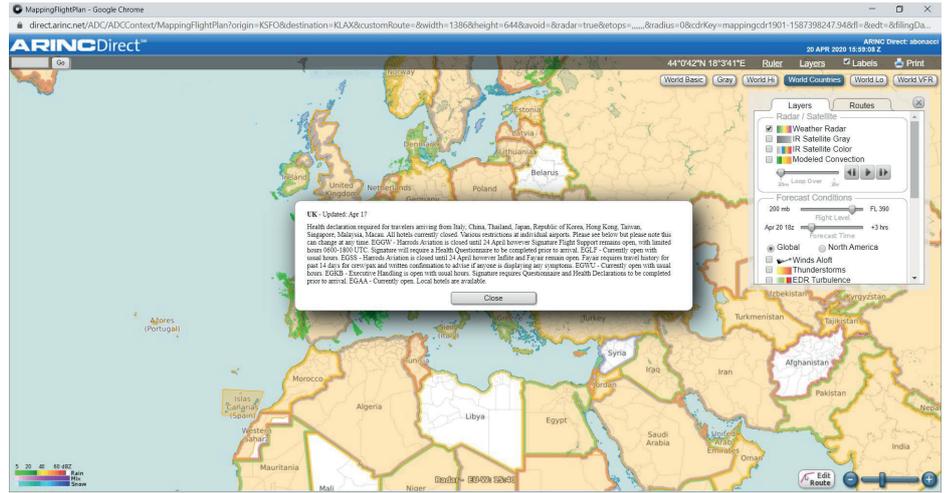
Dorothea Henderson

Vice President Business Aviation & Digital Solutions, Collins Aerospace

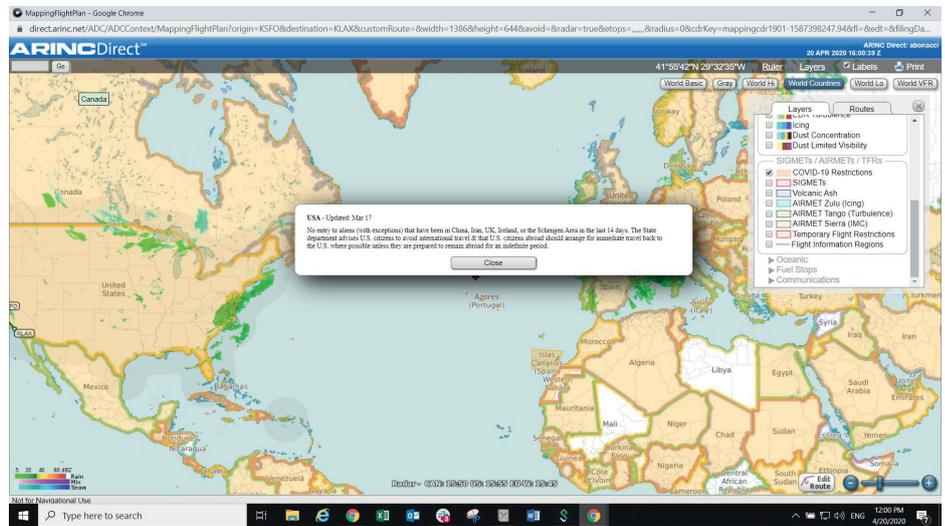
Dori Henderson’s background is in technology and while it includes a brief period in healthcare, where she helped build a digital platform, most importantly she spent two decades in commercial aviation. She says business aviation is very different.

“When I look at my team today, it’s pilots, ex-dispatchers, a former director of maintenance. These are folk who’ve lived it, breathed it and feel very passionately about what needs to change and what value can be added. It’s unique; I sit in innovation meetings and things can get quite heated. People really feel they should focus on doing the right thing – because it will reduce carbon emissions or enable the pilot to focus more on safety. It’s constant ideation, with passion.”

Is she proud of what her team is achieving? “Oh my gosh! It’s actually unbelievable what this team is capable of. They’re some of the smartest, most passionate people I’ve ever worked with. The speed at which we’ve been able to move on new ideas has been phenomenal. I’m extraordinarily proud, not only to be a part of this industry and what it’s doing in response to COVID, but also to be a part of this team.”



COVID-19 map overlay for the UK on ARINC Direct iPad app



Henderson says the pandemic has revealed areas of weakness in the Collins Aerospace business aviation offering, but equally it has demonstrated its strength and ability to adapt to issues never previously seen nor even considered. It has also presented customer support challenges. Collins is not alone in priding itself on the support it provides customers when technical issues arise. But even with an extensive network of service provision, it is difficult to access an avionics bay under social restrictions.

“Our global field services organisation has tech support and technicians all over the globe,” Henderson agrees. “In many cases they cover a region on their own and we deem their support essential. So we’ve enabled them to continue to work when customers need help with their aircraft. Our key priorities are getting to that aircraft to address the issue while protecting our employees. That means ensuring social

distancing is being observed and that they have appropriate PPE, which we’ve shipped to their homes. Of course, demand is down, but they are there, answering calls and getting to aircraft when they’re needed and I think customers appreciate that.”

Beyond the digital suite, she says: “We’ve experienced no problems with connectivity, but obviously the volume of flying is reduced. All our connectivity partners have been that – partners. We’re waving connectivity fees associated with humanitarian flights, supporting our customers who are donating their aircraft and crews to help the frontline. All our connectivity partners have stepped up to help with that.”

New Team Awareness

The situation has made her think differently about her team. With a background primarily in technology and commercial aviation, Henderson had been in business aviation only a year before COVID-19 struck. She

says, “I’ve learned a lot about unscheduled flights in the past 12 months and how complicated they are,” but the industry’s passion for making flights safer, optimising operations and increasing security was clear from day one and continues to surprise her.

“I was initially shocked at how customers genuinely wanted to help the industry improve – we’re still in constant communication with them on how to do things better. Now, I’m amazed at how companies like VistaJet are donating aircraft to get PPE, medical equipment and staff where they need to be. The entire industry is saying: ‘How can we help you do that?’

“When I look at my staff and how they talk about this in our innovation meetings, it’s almost as though the way we’re reacting and the way the industry as a whole is reacting isn’t an exceptional feat, it’s just what they do, what they expect. The speed at which we’ve been able to move on new ideas has been phenomenal.

“The reality is that this is a unique industry and I think it’s ideally positioned to take a leading role in recovery. For us at Collins, we’re a communications company, that’s at the heart of what we do, right across the company. The crisis has led us to think differently about some

of the ways we communicate and how we’ll realise new possibilities in response to the needs of the changed industry. We’re considering services we’d never even thought of before.”

The ability and willingness of Collins Aerospace to step up during the pandemic, doing its best to keep customers flying and support their critical missions, sends a powerful message to operators, MROs and other service providers post-pandemic. It ought to elevate the company’s already excellent reputation, although Henderson’s take on the possibility is interesting.

“We certainly hope customers appreciate the service we provide, but this is an exceptional industry and having seen how my team is reacting to the crisis and how they work with customers, I think what we’ve done is no more than our customers would expect. It’s exactly right they should expect this of us, but it’s an approach and relationship I’ve never seen in any other industry.

“Business aviation is a smaller, more agile industry than commercial aviation, able to make decisions far more rapidly. So, it really is uniquely positioned to drive and lead change, post-crisis. It’s an opportunity for business aviation to make a change for the whole world.”

“We realised early on that our customers needed to understand travel restrictions and within days we’d added a graphic overlay on the map of our iPad app, for example, showing COVID-related travel restrictions”



Beyond Digital

The wider Collins Aerospace organisation has been demonstrating outstanding ingenuity and responsiveness away from the purely digital world.

Paolo Dal Cin, Head of Operations for Raytheon Technologies, for example, requested that Paula Hay, Vice President Operations, Collins Aerospace, determine whether 3D printers across the global enterprise might be used to 3D-print headbands for medical face shields. Soon, almost 70 3D printers across Raytheon Technologies’ global locations were working towards the goal of producing 2,500 headbands per week.

Over at the Collins Aerospace Kilkeel facility in Northern Ireland, Associate Site Director Richard McBride mobilised his team to produce medical scrubs. Tools normally used to manufacture airliner seats were re-rolled for cutting scrub kits that could be sewn together.

Partnering with a local furnishings company to source fabric, the Kilkeel team then used two sewing machines on-site, supplemented by local experienced community sewing capability, to produce each set of scrubs. Within 24 hours the first set was ready for sewing and the facility was soon able to produce 550 ‘kits of parts’, ready to sew, every day.



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