



Geneva Sizzles

BY J.A. DONOGHUE



Another record-breaking year at EBACE reflects European business aviation growth.

Geneva — While Europe's rapid business aviation expansion was highlighted at the 7th annual European Business Aviation Convention & Exhibition (EBACE) in Geneva, concerns were voiced that the infrastructure can't handle the hundreds of airplanes ordered by the region's operators. Also, some discussion at EBACE2007 in mid-May pointed to signs that European business aviation might need to address some safety issues, but insufficient data exist to know the full extent of the problem.



Richard Schofield, NATS safety division chief, speaking during a panel session critiquing the sector's safety standing, said that in a three-year period through December 2006, business jets accounted for just 3.5 percent of U.K. traffic, yet were responsible for 10 percent of the gross navigation errors and 16 percent of level busts. Further, business jet flights were 33 percent of all operations that failed to follow standard departure routes, made 12 percent of altimeter-setting errors, and were involved in 10 percent of all events in which pilots did not fly according to their clearance despite a correct readback.

Schofield was especially concerned about the business jet level-bust trend, saying, "It is getting worse."

Schofield was unable to provide any information on business-flown turboprop or piston-powered airplanes, saying that data for that group are not gathered.

The rates of these errors for U.K.-based aircraft were much lower than those for aircraft coming into NATS airspace from the outside, Schofield said, but he added that it could not be determined if the source of the problem was language or an unfamiliar environment.

David Chapman, U.K. Civil Aviation Authority head of flight operations, also voiced concerns about data. He said that the rate of business aviation fatal accidents is 8.5 times that for large public transport aircraft, a rate he deemed unacceptable. Pointing out the need to gather information on incidents and low-severity safety events in order to direct safety efforts to head off

the next accident, he said, "The ratio of low-level events to fatal accidents is 600-to-1." Airlines have accepted the value of reporting incidents and other safety events and are reaping the benefits of the process with lower accident rates. However, "We are not getting reporting on low-level events from business jet operators," he said.

Another area of concern is the high accident rate in ferry or positioning flights, Chapman said, with that category accounting for 18 out of 43 business jet accidents in the U.K.

Both Chapman and Schofield pointed out the lack of data for many aspects of the business aviation community's operations. Another speaker on the safety panel, consultant Robert Breiling of Robert E. Breiling Associates, had to extrapolate figures from U.S. data to comment on the relative safety of European aviation in several categories, including the long-sought European approval for commercial single-engine operations under instrument meteorological conditions.

Jointly sponsored by the European Business Aviation Association and the National Business Aviation Association, the EBACE meeting has produced spectacular growth in its seven years of existence that reflects the vigor of the European market. This year, 11,267 people, up 15 percent from last year, attended the event, eager to see the wares offered by 354 exhibitors, up 21 percent from the 292 exhibitors in 2006. There were 56 airplanes and four helicopters on display on the Geneva Airport ramp just outside the exhibit hall doors.





Photos: J.A. Donoghue

Business was hot even before the show began, with orders for 63 aircraft valued at more than US\$1.8 billion announced by numerous exhibitors the day before the show opened. During the show the orders continued to mount.

Cessna, for example, counted 40 Citations ordered, including an order for 25 Citations from JetAlliance, plus several piston-engine aircraft. NetJets Europe bought 32 Hawker 4000s, with deliveries to start next year and run through 2016. Eclipse Aviation counted 120 firm orders for Eclipse 500s, plus 60 options, from Etirc Aviation Europe; Eclipse now counts 2,700 orders in its book. Gulfstream sold 20 G450 large-cabin aircraft, plus 17 options, to National Air Services of Saudi Arabia, a company that already ordered 20 Hawker 750s earlier this year and is considering an order for 20 Falcon 2000EXs. Boeing Business Jets lodged two 787-8 VVIP orders, while Airbus on the opening of the show counted five A318 Elites ordered by Petters Group Worldwide.

All this ordering raises the question of where all these airplanes are going to fly given Europe's already-congested airport system and generally poor weather for much of the year. Ironically, host airport Geneva has seen strong growth in low cost carrier (LCC) airline traffic, especially from easyJet, that is pressuring business aircraft operating slots. Likewise, Berlin's Schoenfeld will be pressured, even more so when the downtown Tempelhof closes, and Luton, a London airport, this spring started requiring that business aircraft advance reserve takeoff and landing slots.

Training and simulator companies also found rich rewards by providing the means by which the surge of new pilots will be trained to fly the incoming fleets of business aircraft, opening up new European training centers and selling a wider range of simulators.

And Cessna used the event to accept the European Aviation Safety Agency airworthiness certificate for its new Citation Mustang entry into the very light jet market. ●

Sixty aircraft
were on display
during EBACE 2007
in Geneva.

