Vibrant EBACE Lifts Bizav Spirits

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They went to Geneva hoping to go home in a better mood, and many of them will have done so, based on the uplifting experience Ebace delegates had at this year’s show (May 17 to 19). After a couple of years in which the prevailing vibe at the European bizav clan’s annual gathering has been one of mutual commiseration, Ebace 2011 delivered tangible evidence of recovery.

Nine-digit jet deals are back in fashion, thanks to the likes of VistaJet and Comlux (see below). The contracts they signed during the show largely validated the commonly-held view that demand for larger aircraft models is firmer than it is for light jets. But there were also a smattering of deals involving smaller aircraft too, suggesting that the lifeblood of new orders may once again be reaching bizav’s extremities.

At a show where manufacturers once fell over each other in the scramble to announce new aircraft, Dassault threw down a new gauntlet to the super midsized sector by unveiling plans for the new Falcon 2000S (see page one). It is a jet very much of its time, being consciously designed with an economy price tag and judiciously pared back performance.

More than ever before, this 11th ebace show demonstrated that the event has pulling power that goes far beyond Europe. A rising proportion of the record 511 exhibitors came from the Middle East, Asia and Africa—did significant numbers of the estimated 13,000 visitors (final figure not confirmed as of press time). It was an impressive footfall that took the highly successful event back to its glory years around the middle of the last decade.

The first production-conforming Nextant Aerospace 400XT made its public debut on the Ebace static display, just days after the type’s Williams FJ44-3AP engines received U.S. FAA technical standard order (TSO) approval.

With this approval out of the way, supplemental type certification (STC) for the 400XT is expected next month, according to Nextant president James Miller. FAA officials were expected to wrap up their flight tests by the end of last month, and function and reliability testing is planned to be completed by June 15, paving the way for STC approval by June 30.

The 400XT is a remanufactured Beechjet 400A/Hawker 400XP with the FJ44-3AP engines, Rockwell Collins Pro Line 21 integrated avionics and a zero-timed airframe complete with new paint and interior. During the remanufacturing process, the aircraft undergoes A through D checks and is brought up to compliance with the latest Service Bulletins and Airworthiness Directives. In addition, all primary wiring harnesses are replaced and life-limited parts are swapped out with new or zero-timed components.

Eligio Trombetta, the new general manager of Piaggio Aero, gave AIN details about the Italian airframer’s new P1XX jet program. Rather than representing a relatively modest step up from the existing P.180 Avanti II twin turboprop, the new jet is expected to have intercontinental range as long as 3,900 nm. Piaggio’s management is due to present its designs for the P1XX to the company’s investors this summer. In theory, this could clear the way for a program launch at the NBAA show in October.

Were it not for the tragedy of April’s G650 flight test accident, Gulfstream Aerospace might well have been the star of this year’s Ebace as it was reportedly planning to bring the new long-range jet across the Atlantic to wow the Europeans. Nonetheless, the U.S. manufacturer showed plenty of character in the face of the set-back and was able to report that it is well on its way to achieving certification of both the G650 and the smaller G250 models.

Gulfstream president Joe Lombardo reported that the company now expects to deliver 90 large-cabin aircraft this year (up from 75 in 2010) and 15 super-midsized jets. Demand remains strong outside of North America: during the first quarter about 70 percent of sales were international and half of those were from Asia.

Although the April 2 crash of flight test G650 serial number 6002 has created some potential delays into the certification program, Gulfstream remains confident that the new large-cabin jet will achieve FAA approval by the end of this year. Gulfstream expects to deliver 12 green G650s by the end of this year and has orders for more than 200 of the ultra-large cabin, ultra-long-range jet.

“First and foremost, we’re taking care of the families,” said Pres Henne, senior vice president of programs, engineering and test, referring to the two pilots and two technical specialists killed in the G650 flight test accident. “And we’re working with the NTSB [on the investigation]. They are responsible for announcing the causal factors. We’re working with the FAA on when we can safely resume flight testing. The accident occurred during a difficult test. This was an engine-out, low-speed, high-angle takeoff test. In the near-term, we’ll increase speeds a bit to get some margin,” he said, not ruling out the possibility of some delay to certification.

Airbus announced the rebranding of its corporate jets division as Airbus ACJ, with new aircraft colors and clearer, more consistent names. Each model in the company’s stable of corporate jet offerings will now be preceded by “ACJ,” with the A318 becoming the ACJ318 and so on, all the way up to the mega-bizliners, the ACJ380.

The rebranding includes a new color scheme, with metallic blue shading on most of the ACJ fuselage and tail, "highlighted by flowing curves that echo the color schemes often chosen by Airbus Corporate Jet customers," the company said. The jets also will sport a new Airbus Corporate Jets logo.

The European manufacturer’s rival **Boeing Business Jet** celebrated its 15th anniversary during the show. But what got people’s attention in Geneva was the news that Boeing now has eight firm orders for the 747-8, which first flew in March of this year, and “about a dozen” orders for VIP versions of the 787-8 and 787-9.

Delivery of the VIP 747-8s will begin in the fourth quarter of this year, with VIP 787s deliveries commencing in 2013. Boeing also announced the GE Pusher Program, which will ensure customers of VIP 747-8s have new GE90-1B engines installed following the completion of their interiors.

List price for the 747-8 is $300 million in 2012 fourth quarter U.S. dollars. The 787-8 is priced at $176 million in July 2010 U.S. dollars subject to escalation, and the 787-9 is $207 million with the same escalation.

Hawker Beechcraft Corporation (HBC) announced the King Air 200GTR upgrade program for existing King Air 200GT turboprop owners and operators. The upgrades will increase the performance and resale value of King Air 200GT, according to the company. The King Air 200GTR package incorporates BLR Aerospace composite winglets, a Raisbeck Engineering Ram Air Recovery System (RARS) and Hartwell four-blade composite propellers.

At maximum gross takeoff weight, the upgrade will reduce sea level take off over a 50-foot obstacle to 2,111 feet, a 400-foot reduction over the performance of a King Air B200GT. At a 5,000-foot elevation at 25 degrees C, the King Air 200GT’s takeoff distance over a 50-foot obstacle is 3,094 feet. 700 feet shorter than the B200GT’s. The upgrade also offers a slight increase in climb performance, high-speed cruise and range for King Air B200GT. The improved takeoff performance allows access to more than 1,100 airports previously unavailable to King Air 200GT operators. Certification and availability of the upgrade is expected by the end of this month. The cost is $350,000 (U.S.$) and installation requires four weeks. The upgrades can be performed at any of HBC’s 10 authorized service centers in the U.S. and its Chester, UK authorized service center.

Meanwhile, HBC expects to begin deliveries of the King Air 250 this quarter, following receipt of its type certificate, which Shawn Vick, executive vice president, said is imminent. The twin turboprop, the latest derivative of the popular King Air, made its European debut at Ebace.

New use of composite technology distinguishes the $5.799 million King Air 250 from its predecessor, the King Air B200GT, which the 250 will replace on the production line. Key features include Boundary Layer Research composite winglets, Hartzell composite props and a Raisbeck ram-air recovery system, which give the new derivative model “significantly better runway performance than single-engine utility turboprops,” according to the company. The same upgrades are to be available for King Air 200GTs, which will then be redesignated 200GTRs.

And did HBC have a deal for the Ebace crowd. Any Europe, Middle East, Africa (EMEA) customer who buys a Hawker Beech turbine airplane between Ebace and the end of the second quarter of this year will receive a Lotus sports car. Hawker jet buyers will get a Lotus Evora, which has a manufacturer’s suggested retail price of $64,000. King Air turboprop buyers will receive a Lotus Elise (MSRP of $51,845).

**Cessna** announced that its newest Citation, the $9 million CJ4, has earned its European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) certification. The CJ4 obtained its U.S. Federal Aviation Agency ticket in March 2010, and debuted in Europe at Ebace last year.

**Embraer** has boosted its sales network in Africa, with the appointment of Nigeria’s Barbedos Group as its authorized sales representative in the country, as well as in the nearby west African states of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana and Senegal. The private company, founded in 2002, is based at Kaduna Airport and operates a Legacy 600 and also provides charter services through its Skyjet Aviation Services subsidiary.

**Bombardier Aerospace** is adding more capacity to its major service center at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, increasing the staff by 30 percent and adding shifts this year to provide more flexibility for customers to schedule light and heavy maintenance. Maintenance for the Challenger 850 is also being added as well as expanded expertise in interior refurbishment for the entire Bombardier business jet fleet.

**Eurocopter** debuted the first example of its EC145 Mercedes-Benz Style light twin helicopter at Ebace. With the help of the Mercedes-Benz design team, the airframer has developed a luxury edition of the EC145, featuring both practical and aesthetic improvements inside and outside.

**AgustaWestland** announced an order from Turkish operator Genel Havcilk for a GrandNew light twin that will be used for VIP charters when it is delivered this month. The Italian manufacturer has also just sold an AW109 Power to Australia’s Burbank Group.

**GE Aircraft** whose TechX engine Bombardier selected to power its under-development Global 7000 and Global 8000 ultra-long-range business jets, has rebranded the big turbopfan as the “Passport.”

The first model in what GE hopes will be a series of turbosfans in the 10,000- to 20,000-pound-thrust class will produce up to 16,500 pounds-thrust for the new
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Global jets. It will be called the Passport 20.

**VistaJet** put itself back in full-blown growth mode at the show, placing a major order with **Bombardier** for eight new jets in a move that will take its fleet to more than 50 aircraft. The $383 million deal signed at Ebace includes two Challenger 605s and six Global Expresses. The operator also confirmed that it has six more Globals on order and half a dozen Learjet 60XRs covered by an earlier contract. Deliveries of the latest batch should begin next year and the value of VistaJet’s backlog now stands at $1.3 billion.

The other big deal of the Ebace 2011 show was a $207 million contract signed by **Comlux** for three **Embraer Legacy 650s**, with options for four more. Importantly, this marks the first purchase of Embräer business jets by Comlux, which currently operates only from Airbus and Bombardier aircraft.

The super-midsize Legacy 650s will be based at Comlux Kazakhstan, Fly Comlux’s charter outpost in the former Soviet Republic. Embräer will deliver the first aircraft in December, with the remaining two Legacys to be handed over early next year.

The Comlux group also signed an agreement with Saudia Private Aviation for joint development of charter business opportunities in the Middle East. Comlux Middle East, one of Comlux the Aviation Group’s companies, holds a European air operator’s certificate and will make its fleet of six Airbus Corporate Jets (soon to be eight) available for Saudia Private Aviation customers.

Saudia Private Aviation operates a Dassault Falcon 7X and Hawkwer Beechcraft Hawkew 400XP. It will soon open an FBO in Jeddah, followed by facilities in Riyadh and Dammam. The agreement with Comlux will also help Saudia expand its business in Europe.

**TAG Aviation** announced new charter and lease options and also the addition of an ACJ to its fleet. The new offerings, Call and Fly, TAG Account and TAG Wet Lease will increase the flexibility and simplicity customers enjoy in accessing charter aircraft, according to the company. Call and Fly is aimed at occasional charter customers seeking trip-by-trip bookings who want to avoid the long-term commitments of jet cards and fractional-ownership programs.

TAG Account, created for clients seeking the highest service levels, offers streamlined flight confirmation among its benefits, and requires a fully refundable deposit. The TAG Wet Lease expands the options for heavy charter users who prefer to avoid ownership, offering aircraft leases for periods of one, three, or six months, or for one year or longer. All three services can be personalized for individual clients in consultation with TAG’s charter services team.

TAG Aviation has also received final approval from the Kingdom of Bahrain’s department of Civil Aviation Affairs for an air operator’s certificate for TAG Aviation Bahrain, the company’s newest charter subsidiary. The company indicated that the AOC application process had progressed smoothly despite the recent political violence in Bahrain.

**Wyvern**, the Avinode group’s aviation safety auditing arm, has announced a global expansion of its review standard. Over the last few months the firm has rebranded its audit, which is now called “Wingman,” and will promote operators who have been through the process.

The company set up its Audit Standard almost 20 years ago using its own safety professionals and a customer advisory board comprised of the world’s top corporate flight departments. In June it is due to publish the latest update focused on global operations with particular attention to safety management systems(SMS) this month. Wyvern also recently teamed with Lufthansa Flight Training Services in a move that means it now has auditors in every regulatory jurisdiction in the world.

**Rockwell Collins** reported that FAA has issued the first supplemental type certificate for the Pro Line Fusion avionics system, for installation on Rockwell Collins’s flight test Challenger 601. The issuance of the STC came a few weeks after the FAA approved the final of 50 hardware and software technical standard orders for Pro Line Fusion.

**EMS Aviation** debuted its Aspire family of satellite-based, in-flight connectivity systems at ebace. This includes the company’s new AirMail portable e-mail product and a color, touch-screen handset.

**OnAir** is installing its Mobile OnAir connectivity system into Comlux’s Airbus ACJ aircraft, which will allow passengers to use their mobile phones and smartphones in flight, when the aircraft enters into service in January next year. The service enables calls, text messages, e-mail and Internet surfing. Usage is billed by the passenger’s mobile operator. The inflight communications specialist is also preparing to install Mobile OnAir into a Dassault Falcon 7X aircraft operated by Swiss operator Dasnair.

**ExecuJet Aviation** has added three Spanish FBOs at Gerona, Ibiza and Palma de Mallorca to its ground handling portfolio. At the show, the company also signed an agreement with Turkey’s Bilen Air Services to develop an FBO at Istanbul Ataturk airport. The building, currently operated by Bilen, will undergo a full refurbishment over the next few months.

**Al Bateen Executive Airport** in Abu Dhabi took a step toward its goal of becoming “the best business aviation airport in the world” in the words of general manager Steve Jones, with the introduction of its branded FBO, DhabiJet, at Ebace. The airport also announced agreements for two maintenance providers to set up shop at the site, Jet Aviation and Air Works, which also has just been appointed a Dassault
Czech Republic-based ABS Jets announced the creation of a joint venture with Vienna, Austria-based Avcon Jet to open an Embraer line maintenance station at Kiev Borispol airport in Ukraine. The agreement also covers warranty work and both companies are already Embraer sales representatives.

Jet Aviation launched a new service to help operators comply with the European Union’s new emissions trading scheme (EU ETS). It has also introduced a new mobile Web site, accessible via smartphones so that customers can more readily book services when they are on the move. Also new at its Geneva FBO is an aircraft cleaning service and a refueling agreement with ExxonMobil Avitat.

Signature Flight Support and Aviapartner launched a dedicated into-airplane refueling service at Nice-Côte d’Azur Airport. It is hoped that this will make it easier for business aircraft to get refueled at the busy south of France airport, where airline traffic takes precedence in peak periods.

Rockwell Collins has added European Union regional trip support to the services provided under its Ascend flight information solutions. Last year, the avionics group acquired flight planning and handling provider Air Routing International and rebranded the Air Routing services under the Ascend name. Earlier this year, it further expanded its flight planning portfolio with the acquisition of Computing Technologies for Aviation, developer of Flight Operations System (CTA-FOS) software.

EVO Jet Services introduced its new JetPay Card at ebace. “Our JetPay Card earns revenue via administration fees and contract fuel, so we do not need to make money on landing permit fees, flight plans, briefing packages or handling set-ups,” said Ryan Blair, the group’s manager of card services. “If a client uses JetPay Card, we provide support at no extra cost.”

The ebace show yielded a wealth of news and insights into the world of aircraft completions and refurbishments and much of this will be covered in the Completions & Refurbishments Special Report in the July 2011 edition of AIN. This issue will also feature more detail and background on some of the show’s top stories.

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