

## FRACTIONALS

## NetJets adds Falcon 50s to meet demand in Europe

NetJets Europe is to add four Dassault Falcon 50s to its core fleet as the fractional adapts its operation to meet the needs of European customers. The move is a response to customer calls for large-cabin aircraft able to operate in and out of short runway airports, the company says.

Dassault Falcon Jet will deliver the aircraft by September after completion in the USA. Use of the aircraft will be interchangeable with shares in Cessna Citation Excels and Hawker 800XPs, says Mark Booth, chief executive and managing director of NetJets Europe.

NetJets senior vice-president, marketing, Kevin Russell, says that an order for at least 10 new Falcon 50EXs is likely to follow for the global NetJets fleet. NetJets will add 12 more aircraft to its European fleet by the end of the year, likely to be five Falcon 2000s and three each of the smaller Citation Excels and Citation Bravos. This will take the company's European fleet to 44 aircraft.

A Gulfstream V is likely to be based in Europe next year, possibly followed in 2004 by a Boeing Business Jet, to cater for the "big appetite" for transatlantic flights, says Booth. NetJets has invested \$1.6 billion in aircraft for its European arm and Booth says that although it will take a minimum of two more years to break even, the operation has a headstart on other fractionals on the continent.

Booth says that as Bombardier Flexjet has "retreated to being a block charter company", NetJets will be the only operator with sufficient assets to attract European customers within three years.

Booth estimates that by 2005 the programme will have 1,000 owners, up from today's 150.

NetJets Europe logged its first 100-movement day last month.

## AIRCRAFT DEVELOPMENT GRAHAM WARWICK / WASHINGTON DC

## EJ22 turboprop starts flight test as Eclipse nears debut

First flight of Williams engine two years late, but personal jet approval set for December

Engine manufacturer Williams International has begun flight testing its EJ22, barely two months before the planned first flight of the Eclipse 500 personal jet powered by two of the small turboprops. The 770lb-thrust (3.4kN) engine is being flown on a Rockwell Sabreliner 65 testbed.

Ground testing of engines for the first Eclipse 500, which will be rolled out on 13 July, is about to begin, says Eclipse Aviation chief executive Vern Raburn. The Albuquerque, New Mexico-based company hopes to fly the aircraft by the end of July and is aiming for US certification in December next year.

The airborne tests are being conducted at Reno, Nevada, with the EJ22 mounted on a pylon above the fuselage. Tests will evaluate engine performance, operability and relight capability. The engine on the flying testbed is "close to production" standard, says Raburn.

While thrust is meeting specifications, specific fuel consumption (SFC) is not. "SFC is not there yet, but we understand where the problems are. They are mechanical, not



EJ22 takes off on Sabreliner testbed: the Eclipse is due to fly next month

thermodynamic, and I'm confident we'll get there," says Raburn. Integration of the full-authority digital engine control system is going well, he adds.

Williams originally planned to fly the EJ22 in 2000, but the impact of the delay has been mitigated by Eclipse's decision to simplify the first aircraft to reduce costs prior to the first flight. The company hopes it will be easier to raise the money needed for production with a flying prototype.

The first aircraft will be unpre-

surised and will be used for development testing at low to medium speeds and altitudes, Raburn says. Certification tests will begin with the second, fully conforming, aircraft, which is being built and is scheduled to fly in October. There will be six flight-test aircraft and two ground-test articles, he says. In addition to many hours' component tests, six test engines have already accumulated more than 600h.

Much of the \$220 million Eclipse has raised so far will have been spent by first flight, with a further \$120 million required, but Raburn expects a successful flying debut to attract additional private investment. First flight will also release order deposits held in conditional "escrow" bank accounts.

Eclipse has modified its deposit programme to fund operations. From this month, Eclipse requires an initial payment of \$97,500, with the remaining \$52,500 payable after certification. Nimbus Group has until 30 June to make an \$11.75 million deposit on its 1,000-aircraft deal, after Eclipse was unable to sell Nimbus stock options taken in lieu of payment. Eclipse announced a 112-aircraft order from European private jet club Aviacce late last month (*Flight International*, 4-10 June). Delivery positions are available in 2006, and Eclipse says it has fleet orders extending into 2008.

## PERSONAL JET

## Bidders queue up to supply S-26 systems

Safire Aircraft is evaluating bids from potential suppliers of the airframe, engines, avionics and other systems for its S-26 personal jet. The company is keeping to its plan to fly the aircraft next year, but is still trying to arrange at least \$100 million in external financing.

West Palm Beach, Florida-based Safire says the response to its request for proposals indicates more suppliers are taking the programme seriously. The company has received multiple bids to supply the 1,000lb-thrust (4.5kN) engine. The baseline powerplant has been the TF-1000 from newcomer Agilis Engines, but others have offered engines, Safire says.

Work on the S-26 is being paid for by the company's founders, the Margaritoff family, while efforts to find funding continue. Safire says the Margaritoffs have agreed to "pay the bills" to keep the S-26 on track for certification in 2004. The design is due to be frozen in July.

Safire says it is negotiating with Florida's Palm Beach county on an offer of \$70-75 million in incentives to locate final assembly at North County Airport. The company has evaluated two sites outside Florida.