

FRACTIONAL OWNERSHIP JUSTIN WASTNAGE / LONDON

NetJets steps up pilot recruitment

Fractional operator says it will have to hire 100 additional flightcrew this year as it moves to double membership

Fractional operator NetJets is accelerating its pilot recruitment drive in Europe as it prepares to double its membership this year. NetJets Europe is close to turning an annual profit for the first time since its launch seven years ago.

The Lisbon, Portugal-based operations department of NetJets Europe plans to hire around 100 pilots this year, up from 60 last year. Chief operations officer David Marcus says this figure only keeps up with the delivery of new aircraft and will have to rise to around 120 additional pilots next year to meet customer demand.

The company says most pilots

will be type rated on Cessna Citation Bravos, Excels and Raytheon Hawker 800XPs, as these aircraft are in heaviest demand in Europe.

NetJets Europe flew more than 100 movements a day for much of June and July, and its membership is set to double 2002 levels by the end of the year. If this target is achieved, the company would reach its "critical mass" of customers necessary for profitability (*Flight International*, 11-18 March).

The company has launched a roadshow of static displays at high-profile events, starting with this week's Frankfurt motor show.

NetJets Europe says early heavy promotion is paying off, with members' referrals now accounting for 70% of new business. "It's a tsunami out there at the moment," says NetJets Europe. The company signed up its first Russian fractional owners last month, with five shares in Dassault Falcon 2000s sold within days of each other.

The company, which has also secured its first two customers in Poland over the past month, says it will now hold members-only events in eastern Europe to build on this. UK customers accounted for about half of all members at the beginning of this year, but now

represent less than 30%, as sales in France, Italy and Scandinavia rose during the first half of the year, says the company. Germany is now the prime focus, it adds.

Marcus says the company receives around 100 applications for every pilot position. Successful pilots typically come from either a military or airline background, although the company has a screening process to ensure that pilots have customer service skills. "It can be difficult for some airline pilots, who are used to having a sealed door between them and the passengers, to have to serve drinks to clients," says Marcus.

LAWSUIT

Westminster widens claim

The UK's richest man has widened his lawsuit against Cessna Aircraft to include Raytheon's maintenance arm. Lawyers for the Duke of Westminster have added maintenance contractor Raytheon Aircraft Services to a £3.5 million (\$5.6 million) suit for damage caused to his Cessna Citation following an on-board fire in September 1999.

The aircraft allegedly caught fire after a cleaner switched on a cockpit light while the aircraft was being prepared for flight from Hawarden near Chester, UK.



The Duke of Westminster now operates a Cessna Citation III

Westminster's insurers have been in dispute with Cessna since the incident, which caused £1 million worth of damage to airport buildings. Westminster's company, the Grosvenor Group, says: "We confirm that, as it has not been

possible to settle the dispute to date, legal proceedings are being pursued against both companies."

Cessna and Raytheon confirm the lawsuit exists, but decline to comment further.

IN BRIEF

GAS CONTRACT

Natural gas company Unocal Thailand has extended by five years a contract with CHC Helicopters International and local partner Thai Aviation Services to provide offshore support using two Sikorsky S-76A++ and two S-61N helicopters.

FAA APPROVAL

General Dynamics Aviation Services' West Palm Beach service centre has received approval from the US Federal Aviation Administration to perform maintenance on Raytheon Hawker 800XP business jets.

CZECH AWARD

Sikorsky has awarded a contract to Aero Vodochody for the production of 11 Sikorsky S-76C+ helicopters for the US market. The deal brings to 21 total S-76 production for 2003 by the Odolena Voda, Czech Republic-based manufacturer, increasing in 2004 to 26 helicopters.

MILESTONE PASSED

The Gulfstream IV business jet fleet has surpassed 2 million flight hours since it entered service in 1987. Production was halted last December.

CERTIFICATION

RVSM for One-Eleven

The UK Civil Aviation Authority has approved for the first time a BAC One-Eleven 475 aircraft for reduced vertical separation minimum (RVSM) operations. Installation on the Aravco-operated aircraft was carried out by UK-based Avionics Mobile Services following demand from "several BAC One-Eleven owners".

NOISE LEVELS

FAA rules Naples ban unlawful

The US Federal Aviation Administration has ruled as unlawful a Stage 2 aircraft ban imposed last year by airport authorities in Naples, Florida, and says it will continue to withhold federal funds from the airport.

The FAA says the ban is in conflict with the airport authority's statutory and contractual obligations under the Airport Noise and Capacity Act. It argues that a Stage 2 ban at Naples was based on the air-

port's use of 60dB as the out limit of the noise contour, as opposed to the FAA's 65dB standard. FAA associate administrator for airports Woodie Woodward says: "If an airport could designate any non-compatibility threshold simply based on local government determinations, it could designate noncompatibility thresholds of 60dB, 55dB, or lower, effectively closing airports and severely crippling the nation's air transport system."