

EXECUTIVE TRAVEL: G650 AIRCRAFT IS FAST, LONG RANGE AND PRIVATE

News / Business aviation



The world's fastest long-range civil aircraft quietly taxied into Dubai's Maktoum International airport last week for the Middle East & North Africa Business Aviation Association (Mebaa) show.

Gulfstream's G650 ER can already claim about 25 owners in the region since its launch in 2012, including Qatar Airways with three and three more on order, out of about 215 aircraft sold worldwide.

It flies at nine tenths of the speed of sound and holds the world record for the Dubai to New York trip of 13 hours and seven minutes. "The plane cuts between one hour and an hour and a half off most journeys," says Steve Cass, the company's marketing vice president. "We've had this segment of the executive jet market to ourselves for four years now and that will hold for at least another two."

That's when rival Bombardier plans to deliver its first Global 7000 jet, which will be slightly smaller but a little faster than the G650ER.

This is a remarkably innovative executive jet. Quite apart from its speed and range there is cabin pressurisation to mimic an altitude half that of a conventional aircraft, which makes flying less tiring for the human body.

Then there are the huge windows that flood the cabin with light. Various configurations of the cabin can seat up to 17 passengers and sleep seven on flatbeds.

At the back is a small stateroom for the most important passenger complete with executive bathroom, but without a shower, and a couch that converts into a double bed.

In the main section you have another couch for watching a large-screen TV, a dining or boardroom section with a table that folds out automatically across the full width of the cabin, as well as more seating and a galley. The high-speed internet can handle video conferencing. And a baggage compartment at the back of the cabin means you can access it anytime in flight.

Gulfstream is very discrete about its clients. Some, such as the technology billionaire Elon Musk, have been happy to publish photographs of their G650 ERs. Others like F1's Bernie Ecclestone said he loved the plane but found it too large for some of Europe's smaller airports. He sold his for a substantial premium after delivery.

Access to smaller airports for security and convenience remains a major reason for flying any executive jet as well as the flexible scheduling and privacy.

q&a this jet can fly anywhere

Steve Cass of Gulfstream tells Peter Cooper more about the company's G650 ER:

OK great so when can I take delivery?

2018. There is a two-year wait-list due to high demand for this aircraft. That's why some early clients have resold at a profit.

How much does it cost?

Around US\$70 million depending on the fit-out.

Where can you fly to from the UAE?

Almost anywhere in the world if you trim back the speed a little. Only Chile and Argentina would be out-of-range for this plane from the UAE. We flew here direct from Charlottesville in the southern United States.

What's next from Gulfstream?

The new G500 in 2017 and the G600 in 2018. They will fly at the same speed with the same avionics and large windows, but not as far, and will be cheaper.

How about going supersonic?

We do have a team working on supersonic flight and how to deal with noise of the supersonic

boom and regulatory issues. We see this happening in the future and want to be ready for it. Our clients want this speed.

Did you feel the Trump effect?

It is too early to tell. But we just had the best third quarter for sales in five years. We already supply smaller aircraft for the US presidential flight, which also become Airforce One when airports are too small for the Boeing 747.

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