NAVIGATING CHANGE: LUXAVIATION UK'S GEORGE GALANOPOULOS ON GROWTH, INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE

News / Business aviation

The business aviation landscape is evolving rapidly. Client expectations are shifting, demand for unique travel experiences is on the rise, and aircraft acquisitions remain resilient despite geopolitical uncertainty and a challenging economic environment. Against this backdrop, George Galanopoulos, CEO of Luxaviation UK, shares his perspective on the trends shaping the industry, from fleet expansion and changing travel habits to sustainability and emerging aviation technologies. In this wide-ranging conversation, Galanopoulos discusses the importance of adaptability in a constantly changing market and explains why innovation, operational resilience and a client-first approach remain central to long-term success in business aviation.

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T.O.: It's a pleasure to meet you. I didn't get a chance to catch up with you during Air Charter Expo because you were so busy, so I have quite a few post-event questions. Let's start with the obvious one: what were your main objectives for participating in Air Charter Expo? And are you satisfied with what you achieved and the people you met there?

G.G.: Yes, I am. That's the short answer. Air Charter Expo is one of those exhibitions that started only a few years ago on a relatively small scale, but it has become very niche to our market and extremely useful for us. This is now the third year we've displayed an aircraft there. The first year, we brought a Global 6000. Last year, we showcased a brand-new Praetor 600 straight from the factory. This year, we exhibited a Challenger 604 alongside a Koenigsegg Jesko supercar, which was parked next to the aircraft.

The event was very valuable for us. We met a tremendous number of people despite the weather, which unfortunately wasn't great this year until the final hour. That was a real shame. Nevertheless, I believe the show was fantastic and even better than in previous years.

T.O.: Better in what way? Better attendance, higher-quality discussions, or stronger post-show results?

G.G.: I would say all of the above.Attendance was better from what I could see, there were more exhibitors, the discussions were of a much higher quality, and the calibre of people attending was excellent for us. It provides a unique opportunity in the UK to connect with the right audience.

The only comparable event is the Farnborough Air Show, but that's not specifically focused on business aviation. We attend every year, although we don't exhibit. We host guests, meet clients, and network, but it's a completely different event.

ACE is very much centred on business aviation, and I hope it continues to grow and improve every year.

T.O.: As far as I know, they don't plan to expand it into a multi-day event. Even the European Business Aviation Association explored that possibility following the demise of EBACE. But we'll see. As someone who knows the industry well, what would you say to companies considering Air Charter Expo next year? Why should they make sure not to miss it?

G.G.: As the UK's only significant business aviation event, I believe it offers a unique opportunity to exhibit and showcase aircraft, especially if you've recently added something new to your fleet.

It's also an excellent opportunity to meet the right people: charter brokers, aircraft brokers, suppliers, and other industry stakeholders. That's what makes it unique.

I hope the event continues to grow. I've spoken with the owners of Biggin Hill Airport, who are extremely supportive, and I've suggested attracting one or two major manufacturers and increasing the number of aircraft on display. The more aircraft there are, the more direct clients will attend.

At the moment, the event is largely broker-focused and very B2B. But once we have a stronger aircraft lineup, operators will be able to bring more end users and private clients to the show.

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T.O.: Definitely. I can see you've already made some suggestions. Hopefully I'll finally be able to attend next year. Sometimes there are competing events, and this year I chose to return to support Riga Aviation Forum. Sometimes your home country and hometown call you back. Still, it's great to see the trend. The event is clearly growing, and I think the cooperation between Air Charter Expo and AERO Friedrichshafen is an excellent idea. I'm sure there is much more to come next April.

Let's move on to broader business aviation trends. Many people describe this summer as a record-breaking one for the industry. Everyone seemed to be flying everywhere. Would you say we're seeing a growing trend toward adventure-driven travel? Are clients increasingly looking for unique experiences and destinations, or are you seeing something different?

G.G.: Yes, absolutely. We've seen that trend growing steadily over the last two or three years. Traditionally, summer destinations include Mykonos, Ibiza, the South of France and Croatia. In winter, it's the Caribbean, Dubai and the Maldives.

What we've noticed more recently is a growing interest in unusual destinations, which is something I'm personally passionate about. I try to take one trip every year somewhere completely different, somewhere off the beaten track. I've been fortunate enough to spend five days in Antarctica, visit the gorillas in Rwanda and trek to Everest Base Camp.

I often share these experiences on my personal and company social media channels, and it works remarkably well. Some people criticise it and say, "You're showing off destinations most people can't afford."

What actually happens is that whenever I post something unusual on Instagram, I receive two or three calls from clients who follow me and say, "That looks amazing."

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For example, I visited the Icehotel in Sweden last year and received countless messages from people saying, "That looks incredible. How do I get there?"

I explained that I flew via Stockholm on British Airways, but with a private jet, you can fly directly into Kiruna, where sleds can collect you and take you straight to the Icehotel.

That's exactly the type of experience many clients are searching for today. They want something different.

Earlier this year, we organised an around-the-world journey for a client that was probably one of the best trips we've ever arranged. The trip was conducted on a Global 6000 and started in the UK, continuing through the United States, Central and South America, across the Pacific, Australia, the Far East and back home.

The destinations were extraordinary. Experiences included swimming in the Blue Hole in Belize and visiting remote indigenous tribes in the Amazon.

That's increasingly what our clients want, particularly younger clients. As I've said before, the average age of our clientele has dropped. Traditionally, most clients were in their late fifties or sixties. Today, many are in their thirties and forties, and they're looking for something different.

T.O.: While everyone else seemed to be suffering from the heat this summer, I was actually enjoying it. I have no problem with high temperatures. However, I've heard that some business aviation clients have been looking for destinations with milder weather, such as the Baltic States, Finland, Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. Did you notice that trend as well?

G.G.: I did, and I found it quite surprising that people from the UK were actively looking for cooler destinations during summer. But yes, it's true. We rarely fly to Scandinavia during the summer months, but this year we did. We had flights to Sweden, Norway and Denmark. It seems that some people were looking to escape the 35-degree temperatures elsewhere in Europe.

T.O.: Interestingly, I chose Seville in southern Spain this summer and thoroughly enjoyed the heat. The reason I ask is that at Riga Aviation Forum, many tourism authorities and business aviation companies from the Nordic and Baltic regions were discussing exactly this trend. They reported seeing new clients looking for completely different experiences, combining adventure travel with milder summer temperatures of around 25-28°C.

But let's move on. You mentioned the aircraft you had on static display, and of course, I've been following the latest additions to your fleet. Looking back over the past year, which aircraft would you consider the most significant addition and why? Is it the most utilized? The most operationally efficient? If you had to choose just one, which would it be?

G.G.: Over the past year, we added four aircraft to the UK fleet, as well as several more across other Luxaviation companies worldwide.The additions included a G550 based in Europe and Turkey, a Challenger 604 that we exhibited at Biggin Hill last week, a privately operated Global Express based in the Middle East and Turkey, and a Praetor 600.

Out of all of them, I would say the Praetor 600 was probably the most exciting addition. It was our third Praetor in the UK fleet, and that's important from an operational perspective. Having three aircraft of the same type makes scheduling easier and improves operational flexibility. If one aircraft becomes unavailable, we can move clients onto another Praetor without changing aircraft

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type. It's also a very modern aircraft, extremely popular in the charter market and consistently in demand. For those reasons, it would have to be my favourite.

T.O.: I'll have to double-check, but I've heard overwhelmingly positive feedback about the Praetor 600. And it's not only from aircraft owners, but also from charter clients flying on it. It certainly seems to be a real success story.An obvious question: we're already in September, which means we can gradually start looking back on 2026. Are you satisfied with the year so far, both in terms of your own activity and your clients' activity? And what changes or emerging trends have stood out for you?

G.G.: Overall, 2026 has been quite a successful year for us, especially considering everything happening around the world. The conflict in the Middle East has had a significant impact on the business aviation sector as a whole. Add to that high fuel prices, which we're still dealing with, and there have certainly been challenges. Despite those factors, it's been a good year.

The charter market has remained relatively flat, showing only a modest increase of around two to three percent compared with 2025, and I expect that trend to continue through the remainder of the year.

What has really surprised us, however, is demand in the pre-owned aircraft market. A large number of people are either purchasing an aircraft for the first time or upgrading to a larger one. That wasn't something we expected. Our target this year was to add three aircraft to the UK fleet. We've already added four and may add one or two more before the year ends.

We've also seen substantial increases in the value of certain pre-owned aircraft types due to limited availability. If you look at aircraft such as the Challenger 650 or the Global 6000, values have increased by as much as 10 to 20 percent.

There is still strong demand in the market. I hear the same feedback from other operators. Despite economic uncertainty and geopolitical challenges, a surprising number of clients are actively looking to purchase aircraft.

Some are ready to buy immediately. Others are at the education and evaluation stage, trying to understand which aircraft best suits their needs. And some are planning for next year or even further ahead.

The same applies to manufacturers. If you want to order a Gulfstream G700 today, you're looking at delivery slots around 2029 or 2030. That level of demand has certainly been one of the biggest surprises of 2026.

T.O.: You've mentioned what we might politely call a very unstable global environment. Fuel prices, geopolitical conflicts and constant uncertainty are affecting everyone. How do you remain resilient and continue delivering a high level of service?

In business aviation, someone must always be available almost 24/7, and clients expect everything to work perfectly regardless of what's happening in the world. How does Luxaviation UK maintain that level of resilience and commitment to excellence?

G.G.: We've been in business for 30 years, and in that time, I think we've seen almost everything. We've experienced 9/11, the Icelandic volcanic eruption that closed airspace across Europe, wars, global restrictions and now rising fuel prices. This industry requires adaptability. You have to react quickly and constantly communicate with clients.It's an everyday challenge, Tatiana, and I don't

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believe that's changed in thirty years.

There are quieter periods when things become more predictable and operations are relatively straightforward. Then suddenly something happens and the challenges return. That's simply part of our industry.

Fortunately, we have a strong team. Some of our people have been with us for three decades. At the same time, we're bringing younger professionals into the business and helping them develop their careers.

One of the first things we teach them is that if you want to work in business aviation, you have to accept the challenges. They come with the territory. But we all genuinely enjoy what we do, and that's why so many of us have remained in the industry for so long.

T.O.: My final question, and I promise not to torture you with it for too long.For a few months it seemed that the whole sustainability discussion had faded somewhat into the background. But now it's once again becoming a major topic.I've always believed that business aviation does more than many people realise when it comes to sustainable operations. In fact, our sector invests heavily in new technologies and often helps drive innovation that later benefits the wider aviation industry. Do you think we've finally reached the stage where sustainability is simply accepted as part of our everyday reality? Instead of talking about it constantly, are we now focused on making steady progress through practical day-to-day actions?

G.G.: I think you're absolutely right.Sustainability is here to stay. Whenever larger global issues emerge, it inevitably moves down the list of priorities for a while, but it never disappears. As an industry, we're doing far more than many people realise. We face constant criticism regarding emissions and our environmental impact, but business aviation has always been an industry built on innovation and adaptation.

We're highly regulated, and we're used to responding to new requirements. That will continue.We also have a responsibility to explain our role to the wider public. Too often, business aviation is portrayed as a luxury for wealthy individuals, but that perception is far from reality.

We transport people who drive investment and economic activity. Many of our clients travel to Africa and other regions to carry out humanitarian work. These missions simply wouldn't be possible with many commercial airline schedules.

Some people suggest replacing aircraft entirely with trains. But you cannot reach a remote village in Rwanda or Ethiopia by train. Aviation remains essential.

Beyond that, we support medical transportation and emergency evacuations. We transport critically ill babies in incubators from across the UK to Great Ormond Street Hospital. There is a tremendous amount of vital work that takes place through business aviation.

Can we do more? Of course we can. But ultimately we are limited by the pace of technological development.

Sustainable Aviation Fuel is now part of everyday operations. As it becomes more widely available, we will use more of it. It comes at a higher cost, but I don't believe our clients would object if they know it's benefiting the environment.

Technology continues to evolve rapidly. The eVTOL demonstration at Farnborough in July was a

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perfect example. It's no longer a concept. It's becoming reality.

I'm a strong believer that eVTOL aircraft will succeed and that we'll see commercial operations within the next few years. They won't replace long-haul travel anytime soon, and we're many years away from that. However, they could significantly transform short-distance and intra-UK travel. If the infrastructure and technology are there, people will use it.

T.O.: Thank you very much. Please keep me updated on any additional aircraft joining the fleet this year, as it will be our pleasure to share the news. And hopefully we'll meet again in person soon, whether that's at EBACE, a new version of EBACE, or another industry event altogether. It's always better to have these conversations face-to-face.

G.G.: It has been an absolute pleasure speaking with you, Tatiana. Thank you very much.

28 SEPTEMBER 2026

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