Perennial top FBO performers enhance facilities and services

Since acquiring the rights to run the former UK government's airfield at Farnborough, southwest of London, 11 years ago, TAG Aviation has spent more than $160 million on modern facilities and infrastructure. Its FBO operates as TAG Farnborough Airport and includes a main terminal, control tower, on-site tows and two or three hangars that offer 24/7 live of maintenance, office and conference facilities.

Half of that area comprises the recent addition to the FBO's main capacity of a 20,000-sq-ft building that became operational last October. But only after a couple of years of hesitation had TAG postponed expansion at the beginning of the downturn in 2008. Under a plan approved in 2008 (operations began in 2009), a third hangar will be added to the existing two as TAG continues its infrastructure development. Chief executive Brandon O’Reilly said the investment reflects TAG Aviation’s commitment to serve its customers.

The new hangar will be followed by the construction of a 41,000-sq-ft ground support facilities, which will house aircraft and ground handling equipment, as well as the on-site equipment staff from among its 130 employees. (Additionally, part-time customer service employees are employed at times of high demand.)

What sets the airport apart from competing London-area FBOs is its singular focus on business aviation, according to O’Reilly. “Farnborough is the only airport in Britain that has been specifically developed with business aviation in mind. Every airport in the country is a hybrid, either a commercial airport with business aviation as a part of its operation, or a small aerodrome serving flight aircraft and [with] many users taking place. We even have our own luxury hotel, The Ararat on-site.”

Last year TAG Farnborough Airport received approval to increase the number of aircraft movements from 28,000 to 35,000 by 2019. Within the total, the airport on which TAG has acquired the freedom, having previously held a lease from the UK government, was simultaneously cleared to ease runway end movement from 5,000 to 4,000 in the same period. TAG increased the 2011 overall limit to 31,000, including 5,000 on weekends, and this year will permit 37,000 takeoffs and landings with a 3,900-weekend movement. Some 60 aircraft “all regular customers and the local community,” according to O’Reilly. “Together with local residents, we have invested in developing a new passenger and crew facilities, meeting rooms, Internet, flight planning, refreshments and shower rooms and resting facilities are also available.”

Locally based Kadetavia Group has an equity stake in the privately owned terminal and its Meteor Jet subsidiary operates an on-site 24/7 maintenance facility. The latter is a certified repair station with approvals from both the Hong Kong Civil Aviation Department and the US FAA, and is authorized to perform maintenance on aircraft registered in mainland China as well as at other countries. Metrojet earns 20 million from maintenance, repair, and overhauls for primarily freighters and jetliners and also provides secure transport.

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The FBO is

Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre

Hong Kong has long been a Southeast Asia hub for business aviation and private aviation. The industry is currently undergoing something of a renaissance and the chief executive of Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre (HKBAC), Philip Carberry, tells Pilot that a hub for traffic in and out of mainland China is at the core of a real challenge at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA). It is not UserDaoa, Beijing, Shenzhen, or Shanghai, where the airport is surrounded by the metropolis of Hong Kong, but rather the airport is at the core of the challenge. The Hong Kong- and China-based aircraft management company is part of the HKBAC network of 33 FBOs across China and the world.

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FBO Survey Rules and Methodology

The 2012 FBO Survey in the April edition of AIN covered FBOs in the Americas. This month’s report of the survey covers FBOs in the Eastern Hemisphere. The approximate 500 FBOs in London, Paris, Hong Kong, and Singapore service some 80 percent of the world’s population of 7.1 billion lives on the four continents in this report.

According to ICAO, about 44,000 business jets and turboprop in the world are found in the U.S. with the population of just over 300 million. The number of FBOs is not as big as U.S. but a good number of them are in FBOs in the U.S. So it is not surprising that reader respondents about FBOs in the Eastern Hemisphere still urge for better responses about FBOs in the Americas. This year’s survey received more votes compared to 2011’s received number to complete the ratings table with this report. Nevertheless, as business aviation becomes more spread across the travel the surveying area, AIN confirmed that these FBOs will be qualified in future in reports.

As explained in the section “FBO Survey Rules and Methodology,” in last month’s report, AIN has been asking readers about the service that business travel professionals provide and publishing the results of these surveys since 1987. This year, we revised the rating scales to better understand the services that FBOs provide and to evaluate the customer experience. (TAG is authorized to handle passengers and provide a personal touch,” said Madignier. “The satisfaction of our clients is not a detail, but the assemblyment of many details.”

Even mindful that its competition is not far away, the FBO tries to adopt a first-star hotel approach, aspiring to do everything necessary to ensure that customers get the best, with everything done the right way. With such emphasis, TAG encourages its staff (which numbers 35) to study annual AIN FBO surveys, especially sections outlining customer-reported attributes of good and bad client service.

The FBO, which is located in the private terminal, on its south side area, wants customers to feel that their busi-
ness travel is recognized.” During the forthcoming time slot, “New look for FBO,” which the FBO expects to release by the end of the year, “will be of importance to us as we plan for the forthcoming London Olympic games.”

For example, many staff who might be responsible for customers will leave for personal or family reasons or be retired. Staff or family members are considered as contract staff to help support operations during peak periods. “This will be of importance to us as we plan for the forthcoming London Olympic games.”

As in previous FBO surveys, we invited our qualified FBO subscribers to participate in this one. Each one received a code to enter the survey website, to see what other subscribers from comparable companies think about service, success, business aviation, private aviation, and facilities. The respondent does not know, this feedback will be published and improve the FBO attributes than to its attitude toward customers.

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**Abu Dhabi reaps dividends of bizav**

by Peter Shaw-Smith

Abu Dhabi’s Al Bateen Executive Airport is fast gaining traction as the Middle East’s only dedicated business aviation gateway. The redevelopment of the former military base is just part of a $500 billion wave of investments being advanced in the largest of the United Arab Emirates.

“Al Bateen Executive Airport addresses the need for a high-quality business aviation facility in a prosperous city,” general manager Steve Jones told AIN. “Eighteen months ago it still had a military feel. We set out our stall to develop a brand, focusing on the facilities.”

The latest investment at the permanently Abu Dhabi FBO has been the opening of a dedicated two-floor crew lounge, immediately adjacent to the VIP terminal. Designed with a “European contemporary look,” the new facility features a work area, conference rooms, showers, equipment storage, a prayer room and a rest area serving snacks. Flight planning is available on site, with Dolphins’ managers based in the building to support clients. Looking ahead, the FBO plans to add a secure door directly onto the ramp so that crew can get aircraft without having to go through the VIP lounge.

Dulwich’s VIP terminal consists of a large majlis—the Arabic term literally meaning a place for sitting—that comfortably furnishes a comfortably furnished lounge. This can be divided into two areas, for example, to accommodate groups of travelers separated by gender. Jones explained that the Al Bateen business model calls for it to become a hub of business aviation service. It is seeking to attract MRO providers, such as Jet Aviation and Air Work, with which it signed agreements last year. In its view there is scope for multiple FBOs. The impetus is to match the service model long established at London-based airports such as Farnborough and Biggin Hill.

Today Al Bateen is home to 10 based operators and has enjoyed annual traffic growth rates of approximately 20 percent between 2009 and 2012. Based operator activity has increased by approximately 13 percent, as well, and transit traffic has swollen by as much as 22 percent.

Jones is delighted to be attracting more incoming operators, some of them technical solutions are needed,” acknowledged Jones. “No basic model won’t cut it.”

“They used to go into Dubai [UAE] or Doha [Qatar], but are coming in here increasingly,” he explained. “No basic model won’t cut it; a 24/7 operation, a full ILS system, get their fuel, and away they go.”

So how does Abu Dhabi stack up alongside its neighbor Dubai as a center for business aviation activity? Jones acknowledged the buzz in the bizav community over mounting congestion at Dubai International Airport and delays in the planned relocation of traffic to the new Dubai World Central facility.

“In the short term of Dubai will have its [operation] problems,” Jones said. “If we get [operations] here, now, in the fastest growing city in the world, you can see the future here, and I think that’s why they want to be here.”

That is, Abu Dhabi is currently struggling to free up the space that business aircraft manufacturers and service providers seek. “There is a tight boundary and innovative solutions are needed,” acknowledged Jones.

**First dedicated FBO opens in Nigeria**

by Vladimir Karnozov

Despite the significant growth of business aviation in Russia in recent years, true full-fledged FBOs still exist only in Mos- cow. As some other cities attract increased traffic, there are traces of the sort of ground handling associations facilitated with FBOs, but these are still in an embryonic stage of development.

The Vnukovo 3 executive aviation complex at Moscow’s Vnukovo Airport is the busiest of its type on the country. Construction of the facility was completed in 2007, and operating company Vnukovo FBO has recently enlarged the main terminal. (The FBO has no access, flight-planning facilities, offices, suites for aircraft operators, a conference room and hotel-style short-term accommodations with a lounge and a duty-free store. The upper floor houses offices, suites for aircraft operators, a conference room and a restaurant. There is a separate crew rest area with Internet access, flight-planning facilities and another bar.

The domestic terminal is just 3,500 sq ft. Maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) is handled by Avion-Ex. The 75,000-sq-ft international terminal includes departures and arrivals areas on the ground floor, first-floor rooms, two bars and a duty-free store.

Next to the terminal building is a 162,000-sq-ft hangar for aircraft storage and MRO services. Adjoining this is 248,000 sq ft of apron space.

Boff Skernetzev and Vnukovo airports are now dis-constrained and this is slowing down the rate of business aviation growth. With FBO infrastructure now relatively mature in the Moscow area, the local industry appears to be focusing on developments at other major Russian cities. For example, this summer should see the conclusion of a new business aviation facility at St. Petersburg’s Pulkovo International Airport on a 1 million-sq-ft plot that will include apron space for up to 20 aircraft.

The new FBO, 43,000-sq-ft VIP terminal has been designed to serve up to 1,500 passengers per day. The facility will be operated by Jet Aviation, and its expansion plans include FBOs at the cities of Sochi, Krasnodar, Anapa and Gelendzhik.

**First dedicated FBO opens in Nigeria**

by Kirby J. Harrison

With the opening of Evergreen Apple Nigeria (EAN) last July, the west African coun- try claimed to have its first purpose-built FBO, and business aviation activity is ramping up as the 15,000-sq-ft facility attracts residents and transients alike. The new EAN Hangar Jet Centre at Murtala Mohammed International Airport is ramping up as the 15,000-sq-ft facility attracts residents and transients alike. The new EAN Hangar Jet Centre at Murtala Mohammed International Airport is now fully operational. With access to the 27-aircraft apron and a 538,000-sq-ft craft apron, Vnukovo FBO is handled by the Jet Aviation group, and technical support, pointed out Demuren.

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Demuren, the location in the capital of Lagos is geographi- cally central to much of the country and in a natural refu- eling stop for flights between the southern tip of Africa and much of Western Europe. EAN Hangar Jet Centre recorded 478 aircraft movements from its opening in July 2011 through the end of the year.

**International Traffic**

Demuren expects activity to grow, but within the peaks and valleys typical for FBOs located in tourist-centric regions of the world. “Most of the people who use our facility are business travelers.”

In partnership with Main- tención Centre Malta (MCM), an EASA-certified provider with approaches from most of the major business jet manufactur- ers, the FBO offers maintenance support, pointed out Demuren.
Vector Aviation Vietnam

Airport in Vietnam, recorded sees strong growth in traffic

Nicolas Dang Vu, who told AIN that “activity is continuously growing.” While the FBO incorporates traditional Vietnamese décor, the amenities are similar to those found in FBOs from Paris to Los Angeles: ground handling, crew transfers, passenger and crew lounges, Wi-Fi connectivity, flight planning, fuel, weather, landing slots and ground support. Vector staff can also arrange catering, hotel stays, bag packing and storage, special security, visa service, translation and interpreter services, and car rental. – K.H

More African Growth

Along with the recent opening of a new ground-handling base at Mombasa International Airport in the capital of Mombasa, Kenya by Tanzania-based provider Equity Aviation, the addition of EAN Hangar Jet Centre suggests growing recognition of the importance of business and private aviation and the need to support that industry segment. Equity Aviation managing director Rosemary Kacungira told AIN that she has been pursuing Tanzania officials to move ahead with plans to build a new passenger terminal at Tanzania’s Dar-es-Salaam International Airport. The new terminal would provide much improved support for business and private aircraft. Her company also provides handling on the island of Zanzibar, in addition to representatives in Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda.

Shanghai Hawker Pacific is China’s first real FBO

by Charles Alcock

Shanghai’s Hongqiao Airport is leading the way in providing international-class ground service to business aircraft operators in China. The Shanghai Hawker Pacific Business Aviation Service Centre (SHPBASC) remains, for the time being, the only purpose-built FBO in mainland China, representing a blueprint that general manager Carey Matthews believes will eventually be implemented at other airports.

The facility opened in April 2010, built and operated through a partnership between Australia-based maintenance and service group Hawker Pacific and the Shanghai Airport Authority. “The facility has been built to Chinese tastes and international standards,” Matthews told AIN. Unlike the business aviation enclave at Beijing Capital Airport, Hongqiao has a dedicated channel for customs, immigration and quarantine, allowing immediate processing of passengers and crew. Matthews believes that this approach will eventually be taken at Beijing airports too.

Initially, most flights to Shanghai continued to go to the main Pudong International Airport, some 40 miles outside the city. More recently, some operators have begun to use Hongqiao, which has the added advantage of being easily accessible by high-speed rail services.

“The Chinese authorities are now supportive of business aviation and they want to make it feasible and attractive to both [Shanghai] airports,” said Matthews.

Fuel supplies at Hongqiao—at just about all Chinese airports are controlled by the China National Aviation Fuel Company (SHP), which holds a monopoly on the supply of aviation turbine fuel. There are still fewer than 200 airports in the whole of China’s vast land mass, and Shanghai is unique in having two international airports. Weather at Pudong, situated on the coast, forces aircraft to divert to Hongqiao, which has the added advantage of being the starting point for high-speed rail services.

“Eventually, there will be FBOs all across China because they bring real value to the economy.”

Another advantage that SHPBASC enjoys is that, for the time being, it is the only third-party, independent Part 145 maintenance facility for business aircraft in China, having won this approval from the CAAC in November 2011. In March, Dassault Falcon and Hawker Beechcraft confirmed its authorized service center status and it reached preliminary agreement to take the same step with Cessna. The facility is already cleared to work on Bombardier Global, registered in China.
existing four positions, DFS added capacity for another four in January. And parent company Dassault Aviation is building a showroom that will make two or three more positions available, for the new total of “about 10.”

Also, on ramp space next to the former maintenance hangar “seven or eight additional parking positions” are now available for large business jets. The FBO has added new, bigger tractors to move the increasing number of heavy jets that frequent the FBO. In addition, the company recently acquired ground starter units because, said d’Yvoire, “Local noise mitigation rules limit the time you can use an aircraft’s auxiliary power unit.”

Inside the FBO, crews now benefit from a refurbished area, with Wi-Fi and dedicated computers.

DFS’s average activity is close to 6,000 movements per year. “Le Bourget’s traffic has decreased by 5 to 10 percent since late 2011 and we are following the same trend,” d’Yvoire noted.

Regardless of traffic volume, competition is fierce at Le Bourget. But coping with competition from more than a half dozen other FBOs is actually quite simple, according to d’Yvoire: give customers a reason to be loyal. DFS’s customers, he said, are used to a certain level of quality; they feel at home and are greeted warmly by people who know their expectations. “They are not ready to change for a newcomer,” he asserted. “We are not the most trendy or the cheapest FBO but our customers have good reasons to be loyal.” –T.D.

Top FBOs

Continued from page 23

UK-based business aviation services group Ocean Sky is about to start construction of a new FBO complex at London Luton Airport. The new building will replace Ocean Sky’s existing FBO and will be immediately adjacent to its main hangar and maintenance shops, with direct access to an enlarged ramp space with capacity for 30 aircraft at a time.

The entire redevelopment, to cost upwards of $13 million, will not be fully completed before the end of August, but the additional ramp space will be available for use during this summer’s Olympic Games in London, for which Luton is expected to be a major gateway airport.

The new FBO terminal will include what Ocean Sky claims will be a “luxurious” passenger lounge, concierge services and on-site screening for customs and immigration procedures. Ocean Sky CEO Stephen Grimes said the new facility will allow the company—which is also active in aircraft management, maintenance and charter—to double the number of movements it handles at Luton within a year of its opening.

Ocean Sky also has FBOs at Manchester and Prestwick in the UK and Ibiza and Menorca, Spain. –C.A.