



V V Difficult Project

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The star of the static display at EBACE was the first Boeing 787-8BJ VVIP aircraft (one V is not enough).

It also marked the end of a six-year project for Stephen Vella, principal of Kestrel Aviation Management and his team. The aircraft was sold to China's Deer Jet the week before EBACE. But Kestrel, Boeing and Greenpoint Aviation – which managed the completion – negotiated the right to show the aircraft as part of the sale.

Vella's team helped negotiate the acquisition of the aircraft for the original buyer and chose the designer – Pierrejean Design Studio – and Greenpoint, the completion centre.

The aircraft was delivered from Boeing in January 2014. Neither Greenpoint or Kestrel realised how difficult the process would be.

"Completing a carbon fibre aircraft is infinitely harder than a traditional metal one," says Vella. "There are established calculations for managing loads on legacy aircraft. Carbon fibre requires a completely new data set."

Vella says that Greenpoint invested heavily in the process. "Greenpoint were fantastic, when we came to a problem they put their horns to the task and just solved it," says Vella. "That is not to say we did not trip up at times but when we did, we got straight back up. I have huge respect for them."

The aircraft can fly for 17 hours so Vella says a lot of effort was put into making the aircraft as relaxing as possible. Passenger 787s are relatively quiet aircraft but they also spent a lot of time making this one even quieter. The aircraft has a soft feel inside with many of the fabrics chosen because they provide soundproofing. Wiring the aircraft was literally a marathon task – the cabin has 26 miles of additional wiring.

The aircraft flew to EBACE straight from the modification centre near Seattle – it has flown for less than 30 hours in total – and the VVIP cabin is now being certificated by the FAA.

DeerJet now plans to charter the aircraft out. Surprisingly the Chinese operator has chosen to register and operate the aircraft in Europe. Hongkong Jet, the Hong Kong sister company of DeerJet, is now looking to get an Air Operator's Certificate in Guernsey.

Guernsey and 2-Reg, the division of SGI Aviation that outsources the management of the aircraft registry, announced their first AOC at EBACE. Until then very few people knew that this was a market that 2-Reg was targeting. The first AOC was awarded to Volare Aviation, run by Dustin Dryden who founded UK operator Hangar8 (now part of Gama Aviation). Dryden is not looking to run a management company or charter operator but wants an AOC for aircraft he is using as demonstrators or as inventory before selling them.

Deer Jet beat another buyer by a few days and Vella said they received several strong offers at EBACE.

The price that Deer Jet paid has not been disclosed. But brokers who saw the aircraft estimated that the aircraft was worth more than \$300 million.

"The 787 will undoubtedly become the flagship for Boeing's BBJ product range," says Vella. "It has modest ramp presence is hugely efficient and is perfect for the current economic environment." Vella also believes that Airbus will have success with its A350 VIP programme. Airbus announced a new system to make A350 conversions easier.

For the last two years The Kestrel team have overseen the modification of the BBJ 787 cabin on a full time basis.

"This has undoubtedly been one of the toughest projects any of us have ever worked on," says Vella. "But we are also really proud of the results and the problems we overcame. The next one will be easier." But before they start on the next project, the Kestrel team is having a few weeks off.