

Jet-setting by Hendrik Jonkers

When travelers have no real money-spending limits, prefer to travel in luxurious comfort and want to be treated like kings and queens, traveling by private jet is the way to go. When they would like to carry with them whatever they desire or need (some limits), and their travel is time limited and unpredictable, traveling by private jet is truly the only option for them. In their case, traveling by major airline is just not the answer, since they cannot depart on their trip whenever *they* are ready to leave, and the destination cannot be changed while the flight is happening. Living room or boardroom-style privacy and security is also not available, and even a first-class seat on a major airline will not give the luxurious comfort and amenities that a private jet provides. While the rich and the wealthier first-class travelers are increasingly traveling by private jet, as elite private aviation is becoming more “affordable”, this world is still a mystery to many non-jet-setters who are curious about what private fliers experience in the skies. So, let me share a few interesting jet-setters and their unusual experiences with you.

First, my name is Hendrik (a.k.a. Captain Dutch). After moving to the U.S. from the Netherlands, I have been flying the challenging yet beautiful skies for over 31 years now as an instructor pilot, a commercial pilot, and an airline transport pilot. This means that I have taught aspiring pilots how to fly, have flown airline passengers in commercial jet aircraft for the regional airlines and have also taken many individuals or groups of passengers to their destination in the comfort of a private jet. The other actors in the ensuing saga are “those rich folks” who people wonder about.

Take Ali for instance, she has unlimited access to money, limited time, and travel logistics are difficult as she might have to be in more than one place within a day or over

a few days. Who is she? This private jet-traveler is one of those businesspeople who can afford it and might need to get to one or more destinations in a hurry, within a certain time frame. Major airline flight schedules are generally just not working out for her desires and schedules. She also sometimes travels with a small group of business executives who just want their privacy and being able to continue their private business discussions on the way to their destination(s). There might be a deal-making or other type of business meeting waiting for them that they need to be prepared for.

Ryan can also be included in this business-jet-setting category as he is the coach of a sports team that carries lots of their own equipment with them. Same goes for Reggie who is the manager of a stage-performing band that carries its own musical instruments wherever they perform. Like Ali, Ryan and Reggie quite frequently use this private jet mode of transportation not just for the private business strategy reasons mentioned before. They also do not want to jeopardize their expensive gear and equipment (livelihood) from possibly getting damaged if it is stuffed in major airline cargo bins with 100s of other bags and boxes of varying sizes, shapes, and content, which might cut, scrape, bend or otherwise compromise their tools of the trade, like racing ski-gear and sensitive audio-visual equipment. And, they also might just want their privacy and not having to deal with the masses on their way to a race, a performance, or similar body and mind-taxing experience.

Then, there are Tom and his wife Barbara. They are a wealthier family that occasionally travels together (Dad, Mom, four kids, two dogs, and all their baggage). Imagine what it would be like to steer this cargo train of humans, big and small, with their bags, their ski gear or sports equipment, their animals (one sometimes in a travel

cage) through the airline terminal, onto an airliner with hordes of other people, and then be flying to their place in the Bahamas without losing anyone, or anything, or their minds... These kinds of families that can afford it have come to the realization that there is a better way to travel, have their crazy circus contained within the confines of a flying limousine/luxury RV, and financially it might only be slightly more expensive than flying first class, after you add it all up. What is the value of your sanity if craziness can be limited or contained, right? It's like being in an oasis in the sky for these private jet-setters as they are up there on their hi-tech flying carpets with their favorite beverage in their hands, and sometimes enjoying a personally-prepared or catered dinner, while being rocketed to a waiting "caravan" (black car) at their destination airport.

But wait, even though their lives momentarily turned calm and more relaxing for them, as they might have left their worries 40,000 feet below them on the ground, change is the only constant, right? No doubt it is much easier to deal with change as you are leaning back in your executive leather recliner traveling at 500 mph, but... suddenly, the distinctive ring of Ali's cellphone sounded: "tring...tring...tring" (there is Wi-Fi onboard). James (the other pilot) and I heard it in the cockpit over the humming engine noise, the continuous radio chatter coming from the air traffic controller directing us and airplanes around us, and over the noise of the rushing wind flowing around our pressurized executive mailing tube, as some call our Falcon jet.

James and I continued with our navigation, communication, and aircraft system monitoring duties as our jet continually approached and crossed other satellite-determined points in the sky (we call waypoints) which make up a specific path in the sky that we planned all the way to our destination. "Excuse me, guys", Ali said, as she

leaned into the cockpit between our two pilot seats. “Am very sorry, but is there a way we can stop in Chicago for a bit?” This was not the first time that something like this had happened to us, so I turned around and asked her first if everybody was OK in the back. “Oh yeah, we’re fine, Ali said, just have an emergency developing in our Chicago office and I need to be there as soon as possible. How far away are we?” Fortunately for Ali, we were flying near Indianapolis on a westerly flight path to Los Angeles, so we were less than an hour away. But we could not simply grab the control yolk and turn right, without first communicating with air traffic control, informing them of our need for a diversion, obtaining a new flight path from them that would keep us clear of other aircraft intersecting our path, reprogramming our navigation computer with that cleared flight path, navigating our way to this new destination, and notifying our company, since our flight dispatchers always monitor all our flights.

A similar but distinctly different incident occurred while we were flying Tom and his family to their vacation home in Nassau, the Bahamas. Our flying limousine was packed pretty full with six passenger seats taken up by Dad, Mom and their four kids, as their German Shepherd and Chihuahua were walking around the cabin freely. Some of their watersports equipment, that did not fit in the jet’s baggage compartment, had to be carried in the cabin and was propped between the seats. The flight was going smoothly, but was noisy, because the kids were playing music loudly on their portable boombox, their dogs were playful and barky, and all six were trying to have conversations above the sounds of the music.

Then, “ping... ping... ping” sounded and I looked up at our failure warning panel on our dashboard. An oil warning light for one of our three engines was coming on

intermittently. As the oil pressure kept dropping, we now had an issue that needed immediate in-flight attention (the million-dollar engine might be losing oil that it needs to continue operating normally). James and I agreed that shutting down that engine in-flight would preserve the engine and we would then investigate the oil issue on the ground. Of course, we would then have one less engine to fly with... and we would be crossing the Atlantic Ocean soon to get to Nassau... This all meant that we needed to land close-by to assess the engine problem. West Palm Beach was close, so we decided to go there. The needed navigation and communication tasks were similar to the ones I described before with Ali and our diversion to Chicago, except for that we now had a broken airplane, and everything will be coming to a grinding halt soon, until the engine issue is fixed.

Tom then leaned into the cockpit and said: "Hey guys, everything OK? It sounded like we lost an engine..." I explained to Tom what the issue was and now we had to find Tom, his family, their dogs, and their baggage, another big-enough jet to take them on their seemingly much-wanted vacation. So, money buys you almost everything, and it sure enables private jet-setters to live life fast while secluding themselves, but the world they left behind in their flying limousine/race car, or the flying luxury RV itself, will occasionally remind jet-setters that change is the only constant, and pierce their carefully-guarded bubble.