

Jet show attracts 2,000 to Air Center

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They came mostly wearing slacks and corporate-logo shirts, clambering up narrow gangways to fold themselves in to the cockpits of general aviation's latest models.

Sales reps pointed out technology that enables pilots of small planes and jets to do everything from downloading weather information from satellites to sending out alerts when mountains or other terrain unexpectedly looms ahead.

Eventually, some of the nearly 2,000 people at the Business Aircraft & Jet Preview 2008 show will even write checks with two commas.

Potential customers strolled through Scottsdale Air Center at the Scottsdale Airport Thursday and onto the nearby ramp and hangar to view some 35 aircraft, ranging from sport planes to executive jets.

They included private pilots and corporate pilots such as Joseph Wiggins of Scottsdale.

Lead pilot for a medical supply company he declined to identify, Wiggins had collected an armload of brochures in his quest for a turboprop with more capability and speed than the company's current aircraft. He was waiting for one of his bosses to show up and give the passenger's perspective.

"Those who fly have one perspective, but I want to get an executive out here to sit in the back," Wiggins said.

Among the choices available were two new models from Cirrus Design Corp., a Duluth, Minn., aircraft manufacturer.

Most potential buyers will look at the plane at the show, then arrange for a flight, said show veteran Ken Goble, regional sales manager for Cirrus. Making the sale off the Scottsdale show could take anywhere from two weeks to a year, he said.

Buyers and sellers alike said demand for general aviation aircraft is rising as business owners and top executives want to fly directly to their destinations in less time, without the frustration of lost baggage or being frisked by airport security.

"Talk to any executive at an airport. They're in line, waiting and waiting with the kids crying," Hank Zaremba of Tempe said as he shopped the show with two aviation buddies. "When you look at their (pay) rate, this is the way top executive business is going to keep going."

Don Westrum of Mesa, a corporate pilot and Learjet instructor looking for a new Learjet, agreed. "General aviation is coming back because executives don't want to deal with the airlines anymore."

The more personal service, though, comes at a price.

The typical Cirrus sale ranges between \$475,000 and \$550,000, Goble said.

Brandon Carlson of Scottsdale-based JetsAmerica Inc. was selling one of the new very light jets from Eclipse Aviation Corp. - its mere four hours of flying time logged just this week during its delivery from Albuquerque - for \$1.849 million.

For those who just want to charter the jet, Carlson plans to start an on-demand service from Scottsdale Airport this summer. Rates would run \$1,375 an hour for the Eclipse, \$1,600 an hour for Cessna Aircraft Co.'s Citation Mustang.

Attendees could always dream.

Beechcraft Deonair owners Dolores and John Wolf came from Prescott to check out the Eclipse and the possibility of moving up to the jet class. John Wolf is impressed with the very light jet's speed, altitude and ability to land in as many places as conventional aircraft.

"I'm ready to win the lottery tomorrow so I can buy one," he said. "It's a step forward to have a single-pilot jet . . . It's going to be the future."

Despite the show's invitation-only status, tire kickers got in, too.

"Who knows, I might win the lotto tomorrow," said John Stanley, visiting from the Kansas City area with his aircraft-shopping brother and sister-in-law. "Then I might need some transportation