



# GLOBAL JET COO RICHARD COCU CONCEPT

## THE WIDEBODY DEBATE

When strong brands compete head to head, with great products and inspired marketers behind them, it's not always easy to get a clear picture of which model works when, and why. European charter operator and management specialist, Global Jet Concept, is in a unique position: their large and varied fleet includes both Boeing and Airbus widebodies. Chief Operating Officer Richard Cocu agreed to talk with Altitudes on the undoubted merits of both.

**By Philippa Barr Portrait Matthieu Carlin**

**Images courtesy of Global Jet Concept**

THE GLOBAL JET CONCEPT BBJ AND ACJ ARE CONFIGURED TO SEAT 18 AND 19 PASSENGERS RESPECTIVELY. THEIR RANGE AND COST, HOWEVER, ARE QUITE DIFFERENT.

**Altitudes: How do the two widebody aircraft fit into the Global Jet Concept fleet?**

**Richard Cocu:** The BBJ and ACJ that we have available for charter both joined our fleet within the last two years, but our experience in managing widebodies goes back much further – we have had BBJ1s and BBJ2s, as well as an A319CJ, in our private managed fleet (which currently totals 52 aircraft, including the jets available for charter) for more than five years. This experience made it easy to add the same models to our charter fleet, which now comprises 25 aircraft, with an average age of just two-and-a-half years. We did, of course, have to implement new procedures to service the super-large jets, particularly in training, security and operations. Generally, having the greater fleet breadth has helped us to improve service and quality levels across the board.

**A: Describe the BBJ and ACJ aircraft in your fleet.**

**RC:** The BBJ is a 2001 model that previously belonged to Netjets. The new owner decided to refurbish it before it was integrated into our fleet, so it is in superb condition. Its configuration is 18 seats plus a master bedroom, private office and private bathroom. The ACJ is an Airbus 318 Elite, new in February 2008 in a 19-seat configuration. The cabin is divided into three major zones, the last of which could be converted into a private bedroom. This aircraft is ideal for Europe-Middle East routes, and is greatly appreciated by business people from this region and their families. By way of a cost comparison, the Airbus is around 25-percent cheaper to charter.

**A: Why did you decide to include both models in your fleet despite the potential extra work and cost associated with maintaining and crewing them?**

**RC:** Our Airbus and BBJ both belong to different owners and came to join the fleet after Global Jet Concept was involved in their acquisition. Our objective in providing an advisory service is always to analyse the specific requirements and needs of the customer and to help them to choose the most appropriate aircraft, depending on what is available on the market, whether it be new or pre-owned. Both of these owners had really specific requirements; the BBJ was definitely more appropriate for one, whilst the Airbus fitted the bill more accurately for the other. We would never try to push a new owner into buying one aircraft type or another, no matter whether or not they planned to place the aircraft in our charter fleet, nor how well or less well it would fit into that fleet. What is important is to find the right aircraft for them, then, if they opt for charter in their management contract, to maximise their return on investment and our own revenue.



**A: What reasons do your charter customers give for preferring the BBJ over the ACJ or vice versa? Under what circumstances would you recommend one over the other?**

**RC:** The main reason for preferring the BBJ is when the bedroom is required, especially when the client belongs to a royal family or is a head of state, and particularly when the flight is long. The BBJ can fly 12 hours non-stop whilst the A318 can only manage seven-and-a-half or eight. Conversely, the ACJ tends to be preferred for flights within Europe, the Middle East or Africa, and for roadshows. We would recommend that the customer took the jet that best met their needs, depending on their planned journey and the profile of the traveller.

**A: If a customer's preferred super large jet was not available, would they usually be happy to charter the other one instead?**

**RC:** That could certainly happen, and whether one could be a substitute would depend on the requirements. Because of the range of the BBJ, it is difficult to replace it with the A318 for longer journeys; you would need to incorporate a fuel stop and it would be difficult to convince the customer of the merits of that. The A319 could cover the distance, but that is not a charter aircraft for us. For flights of less than seven hours, we could easily switch to the A318, and customers would generally be happy to do so, not least because of the cost saving. Making the opposite switch – to the BBJ from the A318 – is easier, except for the financial situation – the BBJ is invoiced 20-25% more expensively.

BOTH THE BBJ AND THE ACJ BOAST SPACIOUS, LUXURIOUS INTERIORS. ROYALTY OFTEN PREFER THE BBJ BECAUSE OF ITS BEDROOM, THOUGH THE ACJ IS MORE COST EFFECTIVE OVER SHORTER DISTANCES.



“ DETERMINE THE NEEDS OF THE CUSTOMER; THEY WILL DETERMINE WHICH IS THE BEST MODEL FOR THE JOB ”

**A: Where are your large body aircraft most in demand?**

**RC:** Global Jet Concept has offices throughout Europe – Geneva, Luxembourg, Paris and Monaco – as well as in Moscow and China. The larger aircraft are always in demand for the flights that are suited to their range: the A318 for Middle East-Europe flights and the BBJ for transatlantic flights or flights from Europe to South Africa or Asia. Although we have no office in the Middle East, we have very close relations with operators there and some good contacts with direct customers. Throughout the year, both widebodies are flying to and from Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and Jeddah; they are definitely the most successful aircraft for that market, and their resilience through this crisis has even surprised us. The Middle East royal families really appreciate the very large cabins, especially the Airbus 318 Elite which has a better and bigger interior space, and better modularity. A quick browse of the internet proves that the debate is wide open over the merits of the two brands in the widebody business jet category. In fact, it is almost impossible to even determine the rules of the playing field, as some pundits believe the determining factor is as

simple as the colour and style of the interior (‘VVIPs are completely indifferent to economics and efficiency – it’s convenience and comfort that reign’), whilst others are adamant that the driving force is cost or practicality. No doubt Boeing and Airbus would like to believe that brand strength is a factor too – that once a customer has experienced one or the other, they will stick with it because of the quality of the product. They would probably be horrified to read one chatroom comment: that the differences are negligible! The truth is, brand loyalty aside, there are major advantages for operators and owners in opting for one or the other and sticking to it: maintenance and technical training and costs, as well as crew qualification and experience. It is a credit to Global Jet Concept that they are willing to put their own convenience aside in the interests of their owners and customers and offer two model alternatives. Richard Cocu’s responses to this interview suggest however that in his observation of customer choice, the decision is quite clearcut: whether Airbus or Boeing, customers choose their aircraft on purely practical terms.