



The Best-Selling Wings

Many surprises among the five aircraft most in demand

Embraer Phenom 300

By Mark Huber

PILOTS, PASSENGERS, AND CRITICS ALL have their personal favorites among the latest private-aircraft offerings. But what is the market's verdict? To find out, we analyzed aircraft reported sold for the trailing 12 months ended in March this year. While the top sellers all basically embrace the same winning formula—class-leading (or near it) speed, range, payload, and cabin size—the final results still managed to floor us.

The top two best sellers aren't actually jets. They are turboprops, which use turbine engines to drive propellers. Both of the turboprop models listed have been around for decades, but have been smartly updated over the years. On reflection, it's easy to grasp why they remain so popular. Low-cost turboprops can go places that most jets can't—like short, unpaved runways—and continue to offer great value for the money seven decades into the jet age. Another trend we spotted: The U.S., sadly, no longer owns the business-aircraft industry. Three of the five manufacturers are in Brazil, Canada, and Switzerland, although most of their engines and avionics are still made in the U.S. The exception: Pratt & Whitney Canada, which has emerged as a leading manufacturer of business-aircraft engines.

The databases used to compile the statistics in this article are from the General Aviation Manufacturers Association, the aircraft-resale service Vref, and the Business Jet Delivery Tracker at corporatejetinvestor.com. Listed below, in order of units sold, are this year's top five.

Pilatus PC-12 NG

Manufactured: Switzerland

Top speed: 285 knots

Maximum range: 1,845 nautical miles
(with four passengers)

Passengers: Six to nine

Crew: One to two

Price: \$4.85 million (typically equipped)

Units delivered: 79

We recently profiled this single-engine turboprop (see *Penta*, March 26, 2016), enduringly popular due to the aircraft's large and comfortable cabin, oversize aft cargo door, long range, and frequent modernizing upgrades. The most recent version includes a newly designed propeller that cuts drag and cabin noise. The redesign and repositioning of various antennas, handles, and actuators makes the fuselage aerodynamically slicker and boosts speed and range while cutting climb times. Pilatus Aircraft has also added a handful of new exterior paint schemes and

interior styles. The fit, finish, and attention to detail in the PC-12 NG is on a par with what you would find in any small to medium-size business jet, including slide-swivel reclining seats with leg rests, high-end veneers, and cabin Wi-Fi with audio/video on demand. The PC-12 represents the best of Swiss craftsmanship.

Textron Aviation Beechcraft King Air 350i/ER

Manufactured: U.S.

Top speed: 312 knots

Maximum range: 1,806 nautical miles

Passengers: Eight to 11

Crew: One to two

Price: \$7.405 million

Units delivered: 75

The first King Air came out in 1964, and the model 350, introduced in 1990, is the largest business aircraft from that line. The recent 350i has been updated with the Rockwell Collins Pro Line Fusion touchscreen avionics system and a cabin management system with in-flight entertainment and Wi-Fi. The large oval passenger windows are electronically dimmable. The "squared oval"-shape cabin provides plenty of shoulder room and 355 cubic feet of space. The 350i can also swallow passengers and baggage—1,534 pounds of

payload—while taking off with full fuel tanks from runways as short as 3,300 feet.

Embraer Phenom 300

Manufactured: Brazil
Top speed: 453 knots
Maximum range: 1,971 nautical miles
Passengers: Six to 10
Crew: One to two
Price: \$8.99 million
Units delivered: 72

Foguete de bolso is Portuguese for “pocket rocket,” a term that well describes the Embraer Phenom 300 light jet, the best-selling business jet for the past three years. The 300 climbs like a Death Eater at better than 4,000 ft. a minute initially, reaching its 45,000-ft. ceiling in just 26 minutes. It blasts off from runways as short as 3,138 ft. and can be flown by a single pilot, appealing to the inner fighter jock.

But there is a lot to like for those who are riding in the back, too. The 300 delivers big-jet conveniences in a small package, with multiple optional cabin layouts that include a divan and ultracomfortable single seats. The jet’s standard features include dual-zone climate control, an aft lavatory with privacy door, and its easy-to-use Gogo Biz Wi-Fi.

It’s also comfortable to ride in, with a maximum cabin-pressure altitude of just 6,600 feet—the lowest in its class. Furthermore, its 84 cu. ft. of luggage hold space stores the most baggage in its class. This year, Embraer introduced a cabin refresh for the 300 that includes a newly designed sidewall table, side ledge, and cup holder, and repositioned outlets and charging ports.

Bombardier Challenger 350

Manufactured: Canada
Top speed: 470 knots
Maximum range: 3,200 nautical miles
 (with eight passengers)
Passengers: Nine
Crew: Two
Price: \$26.67 million
Units delivered: 68

Introduced in 2014, the Challenger 350 continues to dominate the super-medium twinjet category, offering a comfortable six-foot-tall, 7-ft.-2-in.-wide cabin with 860 cu. ft. of space. That airy room is coupled to modern avionics and fuel-efficient Honeywell HTF engines that deliver great speed, range, and time-to-climb numbers (41,000 ft. in



Gulfstream G650ER



Textron Aviation Beechcraft King Air 350i/ER



Bombardier Challenger 350



Pilatus PC-12 NG

just 18 minutes). Other improvements include more fuel capacity, extending its range by 145 nautical miles. The avionics and galley have been refreshed, and cabin windows have been expanded by 20%. The cabin itself is now populated with cushy lie-flat single executive seats, while the twinjet’s Lufthansa Technik Nice HD delivers state-of-the-art cabin management and a wireless entertainment system.

Gulfstream G650ER

Manufactured: U.S.
Top speed: 530 knots
Maximum range: 7,500 nautical miles
Passengers: Eight to 19
Crew: Two
Price: \$68.8 Million
Units delivered: 53*

(*Note: Gulfstream does not publicly disclose its large-cabin aircraft deliveries by model. Our total was calculated by tracking individual Gulfstream serial numbers on two delivery databases.)

The Gulfstream G650 still reigns as the fastest long-range, large-cabin business jet money can buy. It’s nearly subsonic at Mach 0.925. The G650ER variant, introduced in 2014, extends the range of the original model by 500 nautical miles. Everything about this bird is big: The entry door is 6 ft. 3 in. tall, the 2,138-cu.-ft. cabin is 8 ft. 6 in. wide, the ceiling is 6 ft. 5 in. tall, the divan is 6 ft. 8 in. long, the cavernous baggage hold is 195 cu. ft., and the oval passenger windows (28 in. by 20.5 in.) seem enormous.

The G650ER has a 100% fresh-air system that provides 3,000-ft. cabin-altitude oxygen levels even at 41,000 ft. This airplane’s fit and finishes are outstanding. The galley has its own water sterilization system, a refrigerator/freezer, and two ovens—enough gear, work area, and storage to provide multiple-meal services and even a party—while the advanced wireless system allows passengers to control cabin functions and to communicate within the airplane and with the outside world using their smartphones.

The state-of-the-art flight controls and avionics give pilots unparalleled situational awareness and the ability to land in the worst weather. You’ll want for nothing on this airplane—it even has a shower, if you request it. ■

MARK HUBER reviews aircraft for Business Jet Traveler.

From top: Gulfstream; Textron; Bombardier; Pilatus