

The Flying Mansion

When the only thing that will do is your own home and office in the sky.

By
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FOR SOME, A GULFSTREAM JUST WON'T DO. THESE DEMANDING TRAVELERS require something like Air Force One, with room to stretch out, walk around, and even work out. They want privacy for working and sleeping and, if the mood strikes, the proper environs for a party. Luckily, Airbus, Boeing, and Embraer make such "bizliners," special models based on commercial airliners and built for the wealthiest of globe-trotters.

A chief pilot of a major company based in Southern California flies his CEO boss in a 5,390-cubic-foot Boeing Business Jet (BBJ), which seats around 19. The pilot won't talk on the record, but says his boss "likes to do his work and then retire to his cabin where he feels like he's at home. He can sleep in comfort in his own bed and arrive in the Middle East fully rested and ready to do business."

Having a layout with dedicated sections means you can work or relax without having to worry about a disruptive and exhausting in-flight conversion—such as, say, turning seats into beds, as you have to do in a "traditional" business jet. The largest of those jets—the Gulfstream G650 and Bombardier Global Express—provide about 2,200 cubic feet of cabin volume. The Airbus Corporate Jet (ACJ) models, built from single-aisle airliners, ramp things up considerably, with 5,300 cubic feet to 8,547 cubic feet over their four models. Similarly, the cabins of three models of single-aisle Boeing Business Jets deliver 5,390 to 7,290 cubic feet.

Buckled up for the price? Such bizliners cost \$70 million to \$110 million fully fitted, and largely appeal to globe-hopping U.S. billionaires, Middle East oil sheiks, and Chinese highfliers. Private individuals account for about 60% of sales, with multinationals making up the rest. Airbus says it has sold about 170 such large corporate jets since the various models were introduced, with about half sold in the Middle East, but with China coming on strong. Meanwhile, Boeing Business Jets has sold 208 bizliners, primarily in North America, naturally, but it is now seeing the most activity in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Last year, the two companies delivered 21 bizliners of varying sizes, up from 13 in 2005 but down from 27 in 2010.

Smaller and larger versions of these airborne stretch limos are also available. Embraer's Lineage, at almost 4,100 cubic feet, costs about \$53 million fully decked out (see the table at right). At the other end, for even more walk-about space, the Airbus twin-aisle A380 and Boeing 747-8 offer enough room for 525 and 467 seats respectively, before being converted to private use. These jumbo bizliners appeal to an even tinier customer base, primarily a few royal families and heads of state trailing large retinues. The U.S. president, for example, travels on one of two highly modi-

fied Boeing 747-200Bs, a model that carries 366 passengers in a three-class configuration.

Still, the cabins of the ACJ and BBJ models, at 5,300-plus cubic feet, provide more than sufficient room for eight to 19 or so passengers. "Elegant" and "classy" are common descriptions of ACJ and BBJ interiors. Typically they include a meeting/dining area, a stateroom/bedroom with a master lavatory and maybe a shower, a full galley, another lav for other passengers and crew, and an enclosed, closet-size crew rest seat.

One BBJ interior we saw had a galley with a center island, a high-definition entertainment system with 46-inch and 42-inch monitors, and a stateroom with a king-size bed, private lavatory, and shower. Returning home with antique furniture and framed art? No problem.

And, "more and more prestigious designers are hired to give a unique touch to the cabin," says Richard Gaona, CEO of Comlux The Aviation Group, a firm that operates several bizliners. Bespoke tweaks might include greatly reduced noise levels, coordinated designs from crystal decanters to throw pillows, and dedicated storage for the owner's watch collection.

Bizliner crews typically consist of two pilots (three for long international flights) and one or two flight attendants. One of the Boeing bizliners we know is fitted with 19 seats, but mostly carries only four passengers in the cabin and no flight attendant. "They are people who like to take care of themselves," the airplane's chief pilot says. Another carries along two aircraft mechanics who double as flight attendants.

Airliners are built to fly 3,500 to 4,200 hours per year; a business jet typically flies about 350 to 400 hours per year. Airbus and Boeing promote their airplanes' reliability and lower cost of parts, and the ability to find a maintenance facility almost anywhere. One of the chief pilots we spoke with confirms he has never had a mechanical problem with his BBJ on a trip during the six years he has been flying it, and claims clients are typically moving up from a Gulfstream G550 or a Bombardier Global Express. The buyer "would have to be willing to trade some speed and altitude capability for more living space," he says. "He would also have to accept about a 25% to 30% increase in the cost structure."

Downside? Almost two years can pass from the order of an aircraft to delivery and completion of the interior, which Steve Taylor, president of Boeing Business Jets, says can cost "\$20 million to \$30 million." If that's too long a wait for your flying residence, consider one of the preowned BBJs and ACJs for sale, usually about 10% of the existing fleet. Want a new interior for a pre-owned bizliner? You will still have to get in line. They are fitted by the same companies busy finishing the new jets. ■

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The conference space, media area, and galley in one Boeing bizliner.

BIZLINER SPACE Everything from coordinated crystal decanters in the living rooms to showers and king-size beds in the private staterooms.

	Lineage 1000	Airbus ACJ319-113	Boeing BBJ737-700IGW
Cabin Volume (cubic feet)	4,085	5,900	5,390
Price with Completed Interior (mil)	\$53	87	71
Variable Cost/Hour (mil)	\$6,432	7,526	7,588
Annual Fixed Cost (mil)	\$0.958	1.054	1.043
Number Built or Delivered	7	71	114

Source: Conklin & de Becker, Orleans, Mass.