

The Focused Road To Happiness

We are currently engaged in helping a first-time buyer acquire a large aircraft. We are employing the principles and practices we have talked extensively about within past editions of this column, all of which are ultimately intended to help the client narrow their focus for the type of aircraft needed to fulfill the mission. This process can be likened to driving initially on a multiple lane interstate highway, then exiting the interstate and taking a narrow two-lane road leading to a turning onto a long, one-lane driveway that finally brings you to your specific destination.

This arrival at your destination represents your selection of the ultimate aircraft of choice for your needs. It sounds easy, especially with the use of a GPS or other such guidance system.

So what is that guidance system used to help the client navigate the road to success in identification of a specific type of aircraft to pursue? With our current client, there are many critical variables to identify and work with to achieve the ultimate success. For instance, if you start - like I always do - with a simple set of city-pairs, it might quickly become apparent that the destination airport traveled to with some regularity has a fairly short runway. Thus, if you take that one destination and review the list of initial aircraft for comparison, the list could be dramatically shortened by that one airport's limitations. Consider this list revision to be the equivalent of turning off the interstate and on to the two-lane road.

It is often the case that one specific criterion can quickly reduce the number of aircraft for consideration. Next come the range limitations of the remaining aircraft on the list. When, combined with passenger/fuel loads on typical missions to obtain the MGTOW calculations, this can help the team continue down the two-lane road with confidence.

It may be during this phase that the list will be shortened again on the basis of range and appetite of the client to make stops en

route or not. Often with International travel factored, range can be critical - especially when confronted with the idea of potentially having enforced fuel stops in unfriendly parts of the world.

As the journey progresses down the two-lane road, the next important step is to determine whether Charter and Aircraft Management will be a component of the purchase. If the answer is "Yes", it will be important to try to select, and engage the preferred Management company early in the process. Their participation in the selection of aircraft as well as their inspection and conformity requirements is critical. There is nothing that shapes a bad outcome quite like a broker who makes all the decisions before dropping the newly acquired aircraft off on the ramp of the Management company and expecting them to take responsibility for everything. The Management company must have ownership of the process early so that they can take some of the responsibility.

Returning to the 'shorter runway' factor above, wouldn't it be terrible if you made decisions about aircraft type leading to an acquisition, only to find that the Management company cannot allow their pilots to operate out of a runway of the length that is critical to your mission need? Additionally, if charter revenue is important to offset your ownership costs, and you were to pick an airplane without first discussing it with the charter company, you could find that the charter company would have advised an airplane from your shortlist with much better charter appeal in the market you are operating in if you had only made them privy to your planning.

Of course once you choose the type of aircraft, the focus process starts all over again because now you must take the entire list of that aircraft type that are 'for sale' into account and search for the best one available. You have effectively just turned back on the interstate. The way ahead that leads to your final two-lane road stretch seeks to narrow the list by interior configuration, installed avionics equipment and office-in-the-sky capabilities.

Then you must determine the motivation of the individual sellers, and the asking prices of the offerings.

Once you're back on the two-lane road, further investigation is required into the individual aircraft still being considered - including their records history and specific condition. Deeper digging will reveal the proximity to specific major airframe or engine costs, and as this becomes clear, you make a right turn onto the one-lane driveway.

This process of focus enables you to get right up to the front door of a very specific location. There can be no substitute for accurate planning and guidance to get here. Nor is there a substitute for being right the first time. After all, don't you feel bad when you knock on the wrong door, thinking you are at the house you were invited to for dinner? Especially so if you are not even in the right neighborhood!

That mistake would have never occurred if you would have set the right address in the GPS, followed the direction and stayed focused.

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