

## Operator Survey: Falcon 10 and 20

*Falcon operators loudly praise their French built business jets while complaining that service from Falcon Jet Corporation has left much to be desired. Meanwhile, FJC is working hard to change that image of poor support.*

**By Jessica Salerno and Richard N. Aarons**

Over the years B/CA has done a number of aircraft owner/operator surveys and has run into a wide range of feelings held by pilots and owners for their flying machines. But never have we uncovered anything similar to the strange love/hate relationship operators of Falcon 10s and 20s have for their airplanes and Falcon Jet Corporation (FJC.)

In short, operators and owners of Falcon 10s and 20s love their airplanes. However, that feeling of love does not extend to FJC, the company that sells and supports the French-manufactured airplanes in the United States. In fact our survey indicates that warm feelings for FJC are rare at best.

The more an operator/owner has had to deal with FJC in the past, the less he likes the Teterboro, New Jersey-based outfit.

To be fair we should point out at the beginning that FJC is well aware of this situation and its new management team is working hard to iron out the problems and to develop solutions.

B/CA's survey involved lengthy telephone conversations with chief pilots, chiefs of maintenance and aviation department managers of geographically and operationally diverse companies. Included in this survey were single-aircraft operators of both Falcon 10s and 20s, mixed-fleet operators and pure-fleet operators.

Aircraft activity by operators ranged from a low of just over 200 hours yearly to a high of well over 1,200 hours annually.

Typical stage lengths were in the 300- to 500-nm range with one operator averaging trips of less than 200 miles in a Falcon 20 and another flying the North Atlantic regularly in a Falcon 10. Load factors were pretty much 2.5 to 3.5 passengers in all operations; several operators, however, were flying with all seats full and a couple were operating with only one soul on board most of the time ("it's really just the Old Man's airplane").

While the survey was not based on a scientifically derived sample, we believe it's a fair representation of the thinking of most U.S. Falcon owners. The participants were selected at random and operate over 20 percent of the Falcon 10s and 20s flying for U.S. corporations.

The emphasis in this survey was on the Falcon 10, plans for which were announced in June 1969 by Avions Marcel Dassault-Breguet Aviation (AMD). The aircraft was to be a scaled-down (1:0.7) version of the Falcon 20. First flight of a GE CJ610-powered Falcon 10 was in late 1970.

Significant changes were made to the wing-root section and dihedral before a new series of test flights in 1971. A second prototype, this one equipped with Garrett AiResearch TFE 731 powerplants, flew in October 1971. By mid-1973 production prototypes were flying, and at the end of that year, French and U.S. certification was granted.

Since that time over 120 Falcon 10s have entered service with U.S. corporations, and they continue to come off the French production lines at the rate of two per month.

We asked each of our survey respondents to describe his fleet and how the Falcon 10 fits into the fleet operationally. We also asked about typical stage lengths, load factors and annual usage. Then, more to the point, we asked for crew likes and dislikes, passenger likes and dislikes, and dispatch reliability reports. Finally, we wanted to know what kind of support the operators were getting from FJC, Garrett, AMD and other vendors and suppliers.

## Fuel Specifics a Big Plus

Typical of the responses was the report from a mid-western utility that operates a small fleet of Falcon 10s. The airplanes have high usage — 60 to 80 hours per month. Normal stage lengths are 350 nm, about 50 minutes; however, the company flies to the East Coast on a regular basis. Average load factor is 3.5.

The company's pilots like the "simplicity of the cockpit layout and ease of system management." They also like the Falcon 10's excellent fuel specifics. The pilots reported that the handbook cruise data are "more than honest . . . We get much better fuel flows and speeds than Falcon reports."

Asked about pilot dislikes, the company reported, "There really are none. Everybody who flies our 10s likes them."

Passenger reactions for this operation also are fairly typical of the entire survey response: "Our passengers really like the compact size of the Falcon 10. They like the idea of a small airplane because there's a good image when only one or two people deplane as opposed to the image created when the same one or two people get out of an airplane that's much larger. There are times when they'd like more baggage space, but the 'good image' more than makes up for any inconvenience caused by size."

Dispatch reliability for this company has been over 99 percent. The chief of maintenance told B/CA that as far as maintenance is concerned, the Falcon 10 is the "finest plane built next to the G-II."

When asked about support from FJC and other vendors, the maintenance chief lost some of his enthusiasm:

►Relationship with FJC: "It's good if you can get to the right people, but that takes some doing." He emphasized that his problems were with the headquarters operation, not the field service reps. "They're great."

►Trouble areas: "Spares support is a problem. They're slow on back orders. France is much too slow in responding to anything. Spares costs are ridiculous. AOG means two to three months in France. They just don't seem to understand 'right now'."

We asked if this operator had ever taken his airplane to FJC's Teterboro facility for service, the answer was "once" and the reaction to that service was "people at the center have an attitude problem. You get the feeling that they don't want you around. They work at their own pace."

This operator is aware that the top management at FJC has changed recently and "has pinpointed the problem areas. However, the middle management and people on the floor haven't gotten the message yet. "

Finally, we asked about specific problems with the airplane itself. The electrical system seems to be the only Falcon 10 system with more than its share of problems, although several operators of earlier 10s had problems with Garrett engine components.

Like all airplanes, the Falcon 10 has a few maintenance quirks. The most troublesome seems to be the tail nav light, which burns out every few days. Most operators keep large stocks on hand, and, in fact, one operator budgets \$28 a week for bulb replacement. (The problem, according to some operators, is in the shock mounting of the light assembly. A fix is in the works.)

When FJC was asked if there were any chronic maintenance problems with the Falcon 10, the company said it "didn't know of any." Informed of this response, an operator commented: "There are probably lots of problems that Falcon thinks have been cleared up because the operators have simply stopped complaining about them."

As we noted, this mid-western utility fairly reflects the responses from most Falcon 10 opera-

tors. Here's a sampling of other responses:

➤A Gulf Coast operator of three Falcon 10s — Pilots like the performance and redundant systems. Passengers like the size and image. Passengers and crew believe "FJC should spend some time and money coming up with better interiors, cabinetry and layout schemes. We don't think they've got anyone who can do it right." Mechanics like the airplane but have problems with FJC support. "We don't buy Falcons because of great support, advertising or marketing. They are just damn lucky they have a great product in the Falcon aircraft."

This operator finds spares availability and delivery times "extremely poor" and prices "expensive relative to other manufacturers." Asked for examples, the operator said, "We had an inflight generator failure near Teterboro, so we dropped in at the FJC Jet Center. They had no spare generators. Hell, we had 11 of them at the home base. We delay. There is absolutely no excuse for that kind of thing happening."

This operator believes field tech reps are "great, knowledgeable and available." So far as new management is concerned, he said "it can only be an improvement. "

➤An East Coast Fortune 500 company — This Falcon 10 lives in a fleet of G-IIIs and flies 850 hours a year with a typical trip length of 750 nm or 2.5 hours. Pilots say they like the airplane and find it is "reliable with plenty of power." They also like its "sports car handling." Passengers have no special likes or dislikes other than there are sometimes hurt feelings over who gets to ride in the small-cabin Falcon 10 while others ride in the Gulfstreams.

This operator's most significant gripe about maintenance is that "the routine engine maintenance in the [Falcon 10's] Garrett powerplants requires more man-hours than the engines on our G-IIIs." (B/CA heard this complaint from several mixed-fleet operators.) Although this operator has found support "generally good," he believes spares "from France are at least 25 percent higher [in cost] than anything from the United States." He adds that the programs promised by FJC's new management are "encouraging. We have a great deal of respect for Corky Meyer," the new FJC president, the operator said.

➤A Great Lakes-area transportation company — This operator has a single Falcon 10 that flies some 700 hours annually on stages typically 70 minutes long. Company pilots report they like the Falcon 10's "handling characteristics and especially the fact that we can make several stops with no refueling."

However, these pilots find a lack of external baggage space bothersome. Passengers generally like the airplane, but "wish they had some more room."

This operator finds support of the airframe and engines "generally good but expensive." Although this operator has had what seems to be more than its share of engine problems, its feeling is that "Garrett seems to fix a problem and it stays fixed."

Falcon, on the other hand, "seems to have a quality control problem with its overhauled parts. Occasionally, they simply don't work."

## **Ops Versus Maintenance**

The examples above are typical of the comments B/CA received from operators responding to the survey. Pilots, passengers and maintenance crews like the Falcon 10. They especially like its mission flexibility, handling characteristics and systems redundancy. Maintenance crews and management don't like the FJC headquarters support, but they do have a great deal of professional respect for field tech reps. Spares prices, they believe, are out of line.

If maintenance problems crop up, they probably involve the electrical system. But these problems seem to create more hassle factors than significant operational difficulties.

Several of the Falcon 10 operators interviewed also operate Falcon 20s. We asked them (and

another dozen flight departments that operate Falcon 20s exclusively) the same questions we asked about the Falcon 10.

As a group, the pilots and passengers of Falcon 20s love their airplanes. Pilots especially like handling characteristics and system design although some of the mechanics interviewed thought the hydraulic system is more complicated than necessary,

Several of the operators thought the Falcon 20 could do with a little more range than its present NBAA/IFR stride of 1,456 nm with four passengers.

If the Falcon 10's weak spot is its electrical system, the Falcon 20's soft place seems to be the new optional thrust reversers. Several operators stated flat out that the units "don't work" or "are not dependable." B/CA checked and was told that there have been problems with the reversers and that Aeronca (the reverser manufacturer) and FJC are working on them.

Falcon 20 operators seem to have had the same unhappy experiences with earlier FJC management that plagued Falcon 10 operators — only more of them because Falcon 20s have been around longer. The first Falcon 20s joined the U.S. corporate fleet in 1965. To date over 230 Falcon 20s have been delivered to U.S. operators.

### **FJC's Response**

The results of B/CA's operator survey will come as no surprise to FJC. Late last year FJC commissioned Ed Blalock Associates, a consultant firm, to find out how Falcon owners felt about FJC's products and product support. The company uncovered the same mixed reviews that B/CA did; that is, Falcon owners love their airplane but find FJC itself considerably less than loveable.

The survey was one of the first public steps taken by new FJC President Corwin (Corky) Meyer. A well-respected pilot and aviation manufacturing executive, Meyer began his tenure at FJC early last spring with pretty much of a clean sweep of management.

Roy W. Bergstrom was brought in from Atlantic Aviation to head up the sales and marketing efforts, and Joseph N. DePalo, a group vice president at AAR Corporation, was named senior vice president and general manager of FJC's Little Rock completion and service center. In addition, several other top and middle management personnel were also shifted (or removed).

Meyer then got a commitment from AMD for "enough money to really get things around here pulled together," and he set to work.

As soon as he got into the job, Meyer started talking to operators to find out what they thought of FJC. The Blalock survey formalized the process, but it told him what he had already discovered: FJC needed work.

Meyer's response was to establish a task force within FJC to come up with an "immediate fix." for the problems. Basically, what Meyer did was to order each department head to turn his day-to-day responsibilities over to a second-in-command while he devoted full time to the task force. The task force, working with several major Falcon operators, then produced a list of operational changes and service improvements that Meyer, in turn, took to France for funding. The result is the "FJC ASAP (Airport Support Action Program) Plan."

The plan attempts to address the specific complaints raised by the operators. Key elements (and target dates) include:

- Increasing the number of customer support field representatives from 10 to 15. The Chicago and Atlanta areas each get second reps; Teterboro gets two and the South American office gets one. (End of 1981)

- Installing a toll-free "hot line" to be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week by FJC personnel. This replaces a night and weekend "non-technical" answering service. (In place)

- Improving warranty administration. The idea is to answer all warranty claims within 60 days

“and normally much more quickly.” (In place)

›Establishing a “product support” control room. This communications center uses telephone, Rapifax and Telex to link aircraft operators directly with Teterboro, service centers, AMD and Little Rock for “prompt resolution of problems.” (In place)

›Improving both the number and capability of all authorized service centers, including Little Rock and Teterboro. Emphasis will be on employee training. New centers may be signed up. (On-going)

›Implementation of a “Maintenance, Reliability, Irritability” (MRI) Program. This program is intended to “improve the identification and times to correct technical problems that may exist on the Falcon. This is being accomplished by expansion of the Service Engineering group, assigning specific responsibilities for problem resolution, and close coordination with Dassault-Breguet and vendors to improve response times.” Presumably this means they’re going to fix the Falcon 10 tail light problem among other things. (On-going)

›Finding local component-repair facilities. Current repair stations will be “reviewed and monitored” more closely. Additional repair facilities will be added. (End of 1981)

›Stocking more spares. In an attempt to “support everything we sell,” FJC will add one-to-two million dollars worth of spares, especially Garrett engine parts and avionics components, to its current inventory. Little Rock will attempt to stock interior spares and some of FJC’s spares’ inventory now stored in France will be moved to Teterboro. (End of 1981)

›Creating the position of “pricing administrator.” This person will “review all pricing policies to ensure accuracy and competitiveness of spare parts prices.” FJC couldn’t say whether this means the price of spares will come down. (In place)

›Reworking internal schedules to see that service bulletin kits become available “early” in the service bulletin process. Specifically, service bulletins “will not be issued without an initial supply of kits to allow accomplishment of the modification.” (On-going)

We suspect two of the most important aspects of the ASAP Plan involve “attitude improvement” and the creation of an “Operator Advisory Board.”

FIC says it “firmly believes that the accomplishment and implementation of the [ASAP] programs will result in major attitude improvements of all employees that have direct customer contact. In addition, we are developing in-house training programs to improve our employees’ interpersonal skills and techniques.”

The results of B/CA’s survey show that this attitude adjustment project could be the most important in FJC’s program. Although the company told us the FJC attitude was “number four” on a list of things operators wanted improved, our survey of owners and operators indicated that the attitude of both FJC and AMD employees heads the improvement-needed list. We should add that most of those questioned in the B/CA survey said the field reps were terrific. Their attitudes seem to be super. FJC’s 354 employees at Teterboro are, for the most part, union members Transport Workers Union and Teamsters. The 687 employees at Little Rock recently voted to drop their union affiliation.

The Operator Advisory Board had its first meeting in December and heard the ASAP Plan outline. Gerard Meyer, an FJC vice president, chairs the board. Current members are Bob Blume, superintendent of maintenance for the Continental Group; Jim Crigler, vice president and air transportation director at El Paso Natural Gas; Terry Edwards, manager of aircraft maintenance for Mountain Bell; Eric Farnell, director of service operations at K-C Aviation Incorporated; Dennis Lewis, chief pilot of Toro Corporation; Bill S. Novak, maintenance chief at Reynolds Industries Incorporated; and Carl Potter, director of aviation for AMAX Incorporated.

During the B/CA survey, we talked with two board members. Both thought the ideas of FJC

to improve service were good; however, both were taking a wait-and-see attitude. “Really, results are at we’re interested in,” said one. “The operators will give FJC all the help it needs to get things straightened out, but holding meetings isn’t the whole answer. We want to see something happen.”

Perhaps the situation concerning Falcon airplanes and Falcon Jet Corporation is best summed up by two of the survey respondents. Said the first, “We’ve learned to live without Falcon Jet.” But, added the second, “We’d really like to take the bird home.” B/CA