

PrivatAir buys five CSeries jets

Swiss firm takes options on more; Jet program has 138 firm orders, 124 options and 30 letters of intent

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Bombardier Inc. notched five more firm orders for its 125-seat CSeries CS100 Thursday in a contract with Swissbased PrivatAir, which also placed options for five more.

At catalogue prices, the firm portion is valued at \$309 million U.S., and at \$636 million U.S. including the options.

Geneva's PrivatAir, founded 35 years ago, flies under various configurations, including a fleet of business jets and an all-business-class operation with larger Boeing commercial aircraft on scheduled routes for other carriers, including Lufthansa, its Swiss subsidiary, Bahrain's Gulf Air and the Republic of Congo's recently formed Equatorial Congo Airlines (ECAir).

The five CS100s will be configured for all-business-class seating, but it wasn't known immediately if the company plans to apply them to its business charter division.

Raymond Jaworowski of consultancy Forecast International in Newtown, Conn., said that PrivatAir "has quite a varied fleet (including Boeing 737s and Bombardier Global Express business jets), so the issue of commonality is a difficult one (to gauge)."

The advantages of flying one aircraft type or family benefit scheduled airlines in particular, he said. Without knowing on what routes and in what division the planes will be placed, Jaworowski said, "it's hard to tell what the benefits will be exactly."

Jaworowski said that a series of orders in recent months ensure that the CSeries "is on its way to being a successful program, one that will make money for them."

The CSeries program now has 138 firm orders, 124 options, 10 purchase rights and letters of intent for 30 planes, a total of 302 commitments.

Jaworowski mentioned PrivatAir in an interview last month, after reports that a fledgling airline startup might fly the CSeries on transatlantic routes from London's City Airport to New York's John F. Kennedy airport in an all-business-class configuration.

Bombardier spokesperson Marc Duchesne said "I imagine (PrivatAir) will" also have the capability to fly a transatlantic route, but could not say whether it would.

In a statement, Bombardier called the order "a superb example of the versatility of the world's only all-new aircraft in its segment."

PrivatAir president and CEO Greg Thomas said in a statement that "the CS100 jetliner is very well-suited for our route expansion plans and we look forward to introducing this very modern aircraft into our fleet."

He gave no details on the routes the plane will fly.

Bombardier Aerospace president Guy Hachey noted the carrier is the CSeries's 11th announced customer.

Philippe Poutissou, vice-president of marketing for Bombardier Commercial Aircraft, said they include "major network carriers, national carriers, premium airlines serving city centre airports, a low-cost airline, leasing companies and now, with ... Privat-Air, a full-service provider to airline partners."

"Our global push ... will ensure that Bombardier will capture a significant portion of the 100-to 149-seat market segment over the next 20 years."

The CSeries also is reportedly duelling with Russia's Sukhoi Superjet 100 for a five-plane order from Bahrain Air at this week's air show in the tiny, troubled kingdom.

Richard Nuttall, chief executive officer of Bahrain Air, was quoted by Russia's Ria Novosti news agency as saying "we are considering the purchase of planes with capacity of 100-130 passengers."

The CSeries CS100 will seat 125 passengers at its scheduled rollout in late 2013, but the current version of the Superjet seats a maximum of 95 passengers. Sukhoi, however, has plans to expand the family of jets to larger models. Novosti added Nuttall said the competition was between Bombardier and Sukhoi.

But reminiscent of the long-running Qatar Airways soap opera, another potential order from Gulf Air, Bahrain's other carrier, for 10 CSeries aircraft has apparently been shelved again.

Reports from Bahrain note despite Hachey's presence at the show, Gulf Air "has failed to schedule a press conference" to announce a deal. As with off-again on-again talks with Qatar Airways, negotiations with Gulf Air are said to have fallen through at the last moment.

Duchesne would not confirm either rumour, adding "we're in talks with more than 70 customers worldwide."

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