

PalmBeachPost.com

 PRINT THIS

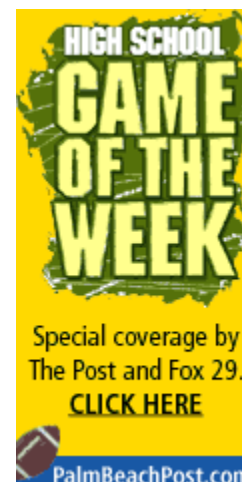
Piper joins jet set at \$2.2 million

By [EVE SAMPLES](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, October 17, 2006

VERO BEACH — After 70 years in the plane-making business, Piper Aircraft Inc. today unveiled its first jet: a svelte, single-engine six-seater that the company is calling a "sport utility jet." The PiperJet, as it's been dubbed, will start at \$2.2 million, and company executives expect deliveries will begin during the first half of 2010.



"This brings us to the realization of a long-term goal and dream for Piper," President and Chief Executive Officer James Bass said at the National Business Aviation Association's 59th annual convention in Orlando, where the plane debuted.

More business news The target market: operator-owners who will use the plane for business and pleasure.
 • [Latest news, columnists](#)
 • [Local stocks](#)
 • [Market tools](#)
 • [Mortgage rates](#)
 • [Gas prices](#)

"We think it's huge market potential, obviously," said Piper spokesman Mark Miller.

Although Vero Beach-based Piper has developed more than 180 aircraft models, the PiperJet is its first foray into the jet market.

The plane fits into the industry's growing "very light jet" segment, which has gained popularity among owner-operators and air taxi companies such as Delray Beach-based DayJet Corp.

Piper has not determined how many jobs will be added to make the jets, or whether it will manufacture them at its Vero Beach headquarters or elsewhere. The decision will depend on what kinds of incentives local communities offer, Miller said.

"It's premature to even go there," he said. "But we are not blocking out other areas."

Piper, which is owned by Bethesda, Md.-based American Capital Strategies Ltd. (Nasdaq: ACAS), employs about 1,050 in Vero Beach.

Bass said it's possible that Piper will establish a joint manufacturing facility with Honda Motor Co. Ltd., which announced in July it will debut its first jet in three to four years.

"All bets are open right now," he explained. "We're exploring multiple possibilities, and that's one of them."

Wherever it opens, the production line will need to be up and running by 2009, Bass added.

Piper and Honda will work together on service and sales of their respective jets, creating an alliance between two of the biggest names in transportation manufacturing.

Five new Piper sales centers across the country will provide the framework for the partnership, Bass announced today.

"We will locate with Honda in facilities in order to sell the PiperJet and HondaJet together," he said.

The two firms won't compete for customers, Piper officials believe, in large part because Piper's jet is smaller and less expensive than the HondaJet. Honda has said it intends to reveal pricing for its jet at the aviation group's conference.

Honda and Piper are the latest to enter the market for very light jets, also known as micro-jets, a field that is growing increasingly crowded.

With leather seats, docking stations for personal electronics and cup holders, the PiperJet is heavy on luxury. In the six-seat configuration, it will include an enclosed lavatory. Without the lavatory, the aircraft will seat seven.

"It's a very upscale jet," Miller said.

Though it will have only one engine, the PiperJet will travel at speeds comparable to some double-engine light jets, he said. Top cruising speed is 414 mph, and it will be able to travel 1,300 miles without refueling, the company reported.

But there could be obstacles. Other single-engine jets have not been very successful in the market, said Raymond Jaworowski, senior aerospace analyst with Newton, Conn.-based Forecast International Inc.

"Some people just prefer the safety and the redundance of twin engines," Jaworowski said. "That's not to say it's not going to work. I mean, the Piper name goes a long way."

The PiperJet has shown early signs of success. Without seeing a model or specifications, some customers have put down \$10,000 deposits.

"Even before having unveiled the jets, we have scores of orders," Miller said, citing the strength of Piper's reputation.

Name recognition definitely will boost the product's chances, Jaworowski said.

"The business aircraft market tends to be kind of conservative," he said. "There's a lot of brand loyalty."