

Europe's Air Taxis Forge Ahead

By Mary Grady

While next-generation light-jet air taxis have been slow to make headway here in the U.S., a new company in Europe seems to have found a sweet spot. Blink, based at Farnborough, near London, operates a fleet of just four Citation Mustangs, and so far it's working out. "Things are going very well for us at the moment," Peter Leiman, a Blink co-founder, told the Financial Times recently. "There are certainly challenging market conditions. But we're the right product at the right time." The company has contracted for 26 more Mustangs and plans to take delivery of one per month. "We remain firm on our entire order," Leiman said. He told the New York Times that the company beat its business-plan targets last year and continues to be on track in 2009. "Our gross margin is positive much earlier than we thought," he said. Blink operates in Western Europe and Scandinavia.

A low-cost air taxi operator called AirCab expects to launch in Munich in 2011. The company plans to charge passengers up to 70 percent less than business jet fares and will operate up to 50 Mustangs and Phenom 100s. Another operator, Jetbird, plans to launch this September in Koln-Bonn, Germany, and will operate a fleet of 50 Phenom 100s. Bikkair, based in Rotterdam, started flying in March 2008 but closed down in February, blaming a lack of access to capital due to the global financial crisis. "Without a doubt we have proven this model to be successful and generated a serious market share," founders Leendert and Bas Bikker told the Times. "It is extremely unfortunate that our start-up phase coincides with the current crisis."