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Jetbird: Inching Toward September Operations

By Robert Wall

In advance of its planned September launch of air taxi operations, Jetbird says it has opened its test on-line booking system.

Jetbird will use Embraer's Phenom 100 very light jets to provide its air taxi service. Unlike DayJet, which failed in the U.S. in part because it ran a complicated system based on selling seats, Jetbird -- and its Mustang-operating rival Blink -- sell the entire aircraft.

I ran a quick test using one of the 29 provided locations, scheduling my nearest pickup point, a flight from Paris Le Bourget at 9 a.m. to visit my colleague in Oxford, England.

Under the booking, the outbound flight would depart Paris at 9 a.m. and get into Oxford's Kidlington airport around 8:48 a.m. local time. Total cost for that leg: €3,888.99 -- or €3,414.06 for the airfare, €211.00 in airport charges, €113.93 in landing fees, and €150 in surcharges. The return leg, leaving Oxford at 4 p.m. would get me into Le Bourget at 5:48 p.m. at cost €3,020.06, for a total round trip cost of €6,909.05.

The system seemed pretty easy to use, but I can't say seeing my colleague for a cup of tea is really worth almost €7,000 -- sorry Doug! On the other hand, I'm also not running a multi-million dollar business and need to get four of my top people to Oxford with as little time wasted as possible.

Jetbird says it developed the online booking system with Coastal Aviation Software. The system is designed to scale up as the air taxi business grows to as many as 100 aircraft in five years, says Stefan Vilner, Jetbird CEO.

That's an important point. One of the issues with DayJet was it built a massive, expensive online booking system for a huge fleet, forgetting to keep things simple for the startup phase. That's a mistake Vilner has said he was looking to avoid.

Jetbird's chief information officer, Darrell McCrone, says that the so called Chopin system the air taxi service will use is designed to "operate a low-cost, pay-as-you-fly model minimizing fuel burn and environmental impact while maximizing customer satisfaction and fleet availability."