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Jetbird circles investors

By Brian Carey

Jetbird, the executive jet airline headed by Irishman Domhnal Slattery, is in the “advanced stages” of fresh fundraising to finance expansion.

The airline is slotted to start operations at the end of next month. It has launched a test booking service online and started its marketing campaign.

The fresh capital was being raised to fund commitments to expand the fleet, a spokesperson said. Jetbird has committed to buying up to 53 executive jets from Embraer, the Brazilian jet maker. It will begin with only three aircraft, but plans to increase the fleet to 10 by the end of this year and 25 by the end of 2010.

Jetbird will offer private flights between 80 European airports, with the prices pitched at up to half those NetJets, the leading private-jet airline.

The company has branded itself as the “on demand air taxi”.

The fleet expansion programme is being funded by a mix of debt and equity.

The company was valued at more than €100m late last year after it defied the credit crunch by raising €10m from a Saudi family for a 9.3% stake.

The company would not say whether the Saudi investor would follow its money and participate in the latest fundraising.

A spokesperson for the airline said the fundraising was “going well”, despite considerable turbulence in the airline sector and said there would be an announcement on the outcome next month.