

# EADS SOCATA



## Nicolas Chabbert, President of EADS Socata, North America

EADS Socata is one of the leading manufacturers of general-aviation aircraft in the world with over 6,000 airplanes in service today, including the TBM700 and TBM850 single-engine turboprop aircraft. Nicolas has been a pilot for 20 years and has a passion for the value and efficiencies of using general-aviation aircraft for both business and leisure transportation. Nicolas shares his perspective of aviation in Europe and the United States.

### **FA: Why is Europe booming with aircraft sales more than the U.S.?**

NC: I don't think it's more than the U.S. I think Europe is catching up with what we have been seeing in the U.S. Business and personal transportation have become more of a necessity. After 9/11, people started to see the inconvenience of going through airport security. What is not very well known in the U.S. is that the security measures for people who travel abroad are the same, in some respects, more drastic. It took some time for Europeans to realize that what they could do as a small trip in a day was no longer possible.

### **FA: Have Americans been more savvy to the benefits of private aviation?**

NC: Yes. Looking back in history, transportation in Europe has been diversified where the U.S. made a clear choice to use air transportation to even up the country. In the U.S., the travel distance was longer, which presented a different means of transportation. In Europe, there was a lot of competition coming from the different choices that did not show the business or wealthy traveler the need for air transportation. Remember, in the U.S., the train was never really developed. In Europe, the high-speed train travels at 180 miles per hour, creating huge efficiencies in small commuting distances.

### **FA: What changed?**

NC: Today, the security measures in train stations are the same as airports. You can no longer just hop on a train. The lines, early arrival, shoes off, bags scanned and no liquids have changed the picture. As a result, Europeans are now discovering the alternative of private aircraft transportation.

### **FA: Have any of the countries adopted tax incentives?**

NC: None. In Europe, there is no approach like the U.S. government has done, which recognizes business aircraft as a faster way to grow a business. The U.S. offers an 81 percent depreciation in the first year. Regardless of this tax incentive, though, people desperately need the aircraft to conduct their business.

### **FA: Is flying into smaller cities, smaller airports and flying direct important?**

NC: Our TBM is a short-field aircraft of 3,000 feet or less. It's a good answer for people who need access to small runways. This gives you a higher chance to get very close to where you need to go, as opposed to longer runways – where you have to be at major airports at a distance to the door of your destination. Our sector of the aircraft market, the turboprop and light-jet segment, has doubled in aircraft sales over the past four years.

### **FA: Are the high fuel prices in Europe a deterrent?**

NC: Avgas is highly taxed in both Europe and the U.S. Jet A is not taxed in Europe. So with Jet A, you don't have a penalty in Europe. It is essentially the same price in Europe as in the U.S. Turboprops and turbofans have distinct advantages in Europe. That is why Europeans are so interested in diesel technology for piston engines. Then, they can use the non-taxed Jet A.

### **FA: Are the European user fees a problem?**

NC: User fees are paid for in one way or another, either in taxes – as in the U.S. – or separately in user fees. It is not a matter of money because

it is such a small number compared to the overall cost of flying. It is more a matter of convenience. Having to separate paying landing fees, controller fees, etc., is an inconvenience that is not in favor of the efficiencies of flying. In some instances now, new online credit card payment solutions in Europe bring services together for a single charge.

### **FA: Do you see an alternative fuel engine for aircraft?**

NC: Do I wish? Yes. Do I see it? From my little window, until engine manufacturers are pushed toward building alternative fuel engines, unless the governments, NASA, the whole industry pull together, it won't become a reality. Personally, I think we have to do it. As energy becomes more and more valuable, more efficient engines must be developed. The technology is slowly getting there. There are now tests being done on electrical engines for airplanes. Already, today, light two-seater airplanes are now successfully being powered by electrical engines. Battery power is getting better and better. But there is a long way to go. We must pursue it!

### **FA: Will the TBM be different in 10 years?**

NC: In the last 20 years, the entire system in the aircraft has changed. The airframe is the same. What's next? Refinements, a more efficient engine, 15 to 20 percent more fuel efficiency. That is doable.



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