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Dassault Celebrates 60 Years of Falcon Business Jets, As Advanced New Models Prepare to Take the Stage

Saint-Cloud, France (May 4, 2023) —“For an aircraft to fly well, it must be beautiful,” Marcel Dassault famously said. Already well known for the sleek Mirage fighters, Dassault—the man and the company—proved the adage once again on May 4, 1963, with the first flight of the Mystère 20, the company’s first business jet. With an eye toward the sizable American market, the Mystère 20 would soon be rebranded the Falcon 20.

Sixty years and more than 2,700 business jets later, Dassault Aviation continues the tradition of building beautiful, advanced-technology aircraft.

“The formula has not changed,” said Dassault Aviation’s Chairman and CEO Eric Trappier. “Every Dassault aircraft must have superb handling, beautiful lines, and rugged construction. And, of course, it has to provide state-of-the-art comfort.”

The Falcon 20 wowed some of the top aviation leaders of the time, including Charles Lindbergh, Pan Am chief executive Juan Trippe, and FedEx founder Fred Smith. It went on to spawn 27 different model types that found eager buyers among entrepreneurs, government agencies, and several nations’ armed forces. Its pioneering safety features, including the use of rugged fighter structures and systems, set the standard for countless future safety improvements, from head-up cockpit displays to digital flight controls—technology that subsequently became widespread across the industry.

Today, Dassault’s strong corporate values, design ethos, and relentless focus on elegant lines, inside and out are embodied in two brand new models, the 5,500 nm Falcon 6X and the 7,500 nm Falcon 10X. These aircraft feature the largest cabin cross sections in business aviation, setting a new standard for long-range passenger comfort.

Each has been recognized by the design community with prestigious interior design awards. The 6X, which enters service this year, is equipped with Dassault’s most advanced digital flight control system to date. The 10X, which is in the early stages of assembly, will come with even more advanced systems and safety features.

The first Dassault business jet takes off.

A little after 5 pm on May 4, 1963, test pilots René Bigand and Jean Dilliare “gave it the gas,” as one historical account recalls, taking the Falcon 20 for an inaugural one-hour flight.

The flight occurred late in the day because of the visit of Charles Lindbergh, who dropped by to inspect the new business jet on behalf of Pan Am. It was only after he had departed Dassault’s Mérignac final assembly plant, near Bordeaux, that the flight team readied the aircraft for flight.

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Lindbergh reportedly wired Pan Am CEO Juan Trippe: “I’ve found our bird.” The airline promptly ordered 40 units with an option for 120 more and established Pan Am Business Jets to run its executive jet operations. The new entity later evolved into Dassault Falcon Jet (DFJ), a fully owned Dassault Aviation affiliate. Headquartered in Teterboro, New Jersey, DFJ is responsible for representing and supporting Falcons in the U.S. and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere.

More orders

In 1973, Fred Smith launched FedEx with a fleet of 33 Falcon 20s modified with a large cargo door, helping set that company on the road to success. In the 1980s, the U.S. Coast Guard ordered 41 Falcon 20’s (designated the HU-25) modified for search and rescue. In all, Dassault went on to build nearly 500 20-series aircraft.

A history of continuous advances

In the years following, the company introduced a series of aircraft models widely considered by pilots to be among the best business jets to fly. Currently, more than 2,100 Falcons are operating in over 90 countries around the world.

The best-selling model has been the Falcon 2000, a highly economical, super-efficient twin that has been continuously updated to remain at the top of its class. Nearly 700 have been delivered so far.

The second-best seller has been the workhorse Falcon 900, which has also gone through numerous iterations. To date more than 550 of these aircraft have been delivered, including two that were recently handed over to the Royal Air Force for VIP transportation service.

Also popular has been the fly-by-wire Falcon 7X/8X line. Some 400 of these ultra-efficient, versatile, very long-range models have come off the assembly line.

“Through these different models, we have built up a strong legacy and a solid base of technological know-how that makes us confident in our ability to continue developing new products that fully meet customer expectations,” said Trappier. “Sixty years on, Falcons are still completely distinctive in the business jet world: beautiful, delightful to fly, and always on the leading edge of technology, bringing safety, comfort and productivity benefits to operators around the globe.”

ABOUT DASSAULT AVIATION:

Dassault Aviation is a leading aerospace company with a presence in over 90 countries across six continents. Dassault designs and builds the family of Falcon business jets as well as the Rafale fighter jet. The company employs a workforce of over 12,000 and has production facilities in both France and the United States, and a worldwide service network. Since the rollout of the first Falcon 20 in 1963, over 2,700 Falcons have been delivered. The tri-jet and twin-engine lines offer outstanding efficiency and comfort, with ranges from 4,000 nm to 7,500nm. They include the new flagship Falcon 10X, the pioneering Falcon 7X and 8X, the extra widebody Falcon 6X, and the versatile Falcon 900LX and 2000LXS.

For more information about Dassault Falcon business jets, visit: www.dassaultfalcon.com

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