

Comlux brings even heavier metal to the market



Fly Comlux, the private charter division of Comlux The Aviation Group, is celebrating a very special event: the putting into operation of a 767-200ER in VIP configuration. Jo Murray speaks to Richard Gaona, President, about the introduction of Comlux's latest addition

"Putting the 767 into service is a major event," enthuses Gaona. The aircraft will, of course, be the largest aircraft in the Comlux fleet. It will have a range of 14 hours and is being configured to carry 60 passengers in style.

The airframe itself is pre-owned and has been in the hangars at Comlux America undergoing refurbishment for a whole year. Gaona describes the resultant cabin as "an impressive arrangement" and "unique". The interior boasts an office, dining room and premium seating. "There really is nothing else like it," he says.

So who is likely to charter this aircraft with its 60 seats? Gaona responds that it is aimed at the head of state market, governments and delegations. He is planning to base the 767 VIP aircraft in Bahrain so that it can easily serve the Middle East and African markets. Comlux has applied for an AOC from the authorities in Aruba in order to create additional market opportunities for the aircraft type.

Of course Fly Comlux is no stranger to flying commercial airliner sized aircraft in VIP configuration. The company has five Airbus aircraft available for private charter. "The narrowbody market

is still very competitive," concedes Gaona, adding that there are a plethora of these aircraft types available for private charter. However, he reckons Comlux has an edge as it has a whole fleet of these aircraft types – and this is what makes the business case for operating narrowbodies, ie a whole fleet rather than an individual aircraft.

"The Airbuses are based wherever the customer is based," he explains. "There are two in the Middle East but there are also Comlux Airbuses in the CIS and Russia."

There is no denying that Fly Comlux has a penchant for large cabined aircraft. Apart from the 767 and the Airbus narrowbodies, Comlux The Aviation Group has announced a contract for the acquisition of three Legacy 650 executive jets for Fly Comlux to be based in Kazakhstan. Options for another four aircraft have also been negotiated. The total value of the deal, at list price, comes to \$90.7 million, and could reach \$211.7 million, if all options are confirmed. The first delivery is scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2011.

The rationale for this Legacy fleet is simple: there are a large number of corporations located in Kazakhstan that serve the oil and gas industry in particular, who need to be able to fly direct to the region from, say Europe, and need to be productive while they are in the air.

In addition to the 767-200ER, the five Airbuses and three Legacy 650s, the Fly Comlux fleet is also getting ready to welcome two Global 7000s which are currently on order as well as two ordered Global 6000 aircraft. A sixth Airbus will join the fleet in March 2012. There are also around 15 Bombardier aircraft and one Dassault 900LX in the Comlux stable.

But Comlux is not just fleet building. It is a diversified but compact group of businesses that serves the market as completely as possible. It is also not afraid to grow through agreements with other companies. For example, earlier this year, Comlux Middle East and Saudia Private Aviation signed an agreement to develop VIP charter markets in the Middle East.

Comlux Middle East, in the Kingdom of Bahrain, is situated close to Saudi Arabia and will make its fleet of Airbuses available for the clients of Saudia Private Aviation. Meanwhile, the Saudia Private Aviation fleet, available for charter (Falcon 7X and Hawker 400XP), is an excellent complement to the Comlux fleet.

But for now, the big splash coming from Comlux relates to the 767. And let's face it, it is not every day that a business aviation company announces it has a 767 available for private charter. ●