

PROFESSIONAL PILOT

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LAS
LONDON AIR SERVICES

Drugstore chain boosts profits and extends reach with 2 Bombardier Learjet 45s. At YVR (Vancouver Intl BC) base, (L-R) London Air Services & London Drugs Pres Wynne Powell, Capt Terry Batyi, FO Steven Inotaj, Capt Chris Simpson and FO Mark Wittig frame a cart full of London Drugs products with 1 of the LAS Lear 45s on the ramp behind them.

Situational Awareness



Photos by Grant McLaren

London Air Service finds just the right prescription with Bombardier bizjets

Company uses 2 Learjet 45s to make stops to London Drugs stores throughout Canada and charter ops to Central America.

By Grant McLaren
Editor-at-Large



For Vancouver BC-based H Y Louie Group, a 100-year-old family retailing company, the time had come to buy a corporate aircraft. Having chartered assorted Learjets over a 4-year period, the group was sold on the benefits of corporate aviation, but charter availability was becoming a problem. The task of setting up the new flight department was given to

London Air Service flight department with 1 of its 2 Bombardier Learjet 45s at YVR (Vancouver Intl BC). (L-R) Pres of LAS and London Drugs Wynne Powell, Capt Chris Simpson, Capt Terry Batyi, FO Mark Wittig and FO Steven Inotai.

Wynne Powell, president of the group's 54-store London Drugs retail chain with locations throughout western Canada.

An accountant by profession who has a keen interest in technology, Powell evaluated all available midsize light jet offerings, including Cessna Citations, the Galaxy, the Astra SPX and Bombardier Learjets. Eventually, after talking with aircraft manufacturers and studying how major US retailers deployed their business jets most effectively, Powell settled on the Learjet 45. But he had both good and bad news to give his Chairman Brandt Louie.

"I told our chairman the good news was that I'd found the ideal

business aircraft for our missions requirements—the Learjet 45," recalls Powell, who made the proposal in late 1999. The bad news was that there was a 5-year waiting list for a factory-new aircraft. Brandt, a decisive businessman not accustomed to wasting time, looked up from his desk and said, "Fix it!"

Within a few weeks Powell had zeroed in on Learjet 45 hull number 024, originally ordered by a US company, which was still at the Learjet factory and was available for sale.

"I called the broker on the US east coast and said, 'Don't sell that aircraft until you talk with us.' We offered cash and we wanted that



Photos courtesy London Drugs

London Drugs, with 54 retail stores throughout western Canada, offers everything from computer and home entertainment systems to pharmaceuticals, cosmetics (inset L), housewares (inset R) and grocery items. The company decided to invest in a corporate jet after 4 yrs of chartering aircraft.

particular aircraft," continues Powell. "We chartered a Lear 35, flew to Wichita and within 45 min of landing we were negotiating for the aircraft. Bombardier tells us it's one of the fastest aircraft sales they've ever seen happen."

Meanwhile, while he was waiting for delivery of the 45, Powell was able to hire a highly experienced chief pilot, Mike Krall, who'd flown Learjets for more than 20 yrs and had some 10,000 hrs in the Bombardier twinjets. Capt Chris Simpson, with more than 5000 hrs of Learjet experience, was also brought on board. A deal was struck with Avitat YVR (Vancouver Intl BC, Canada) for hangar space and ground support and Ted Foster was signed on as dir of maintenance.

Today, London Air Services (LAS) has 8 full-time pilots and a portfolio of flying stock that includes 2 Learjet 45s and a Challenger 604 slated for delivery in Feb 2002. A Bombardier Continental is expected to arrive on the flightline in 2005.

"US retail operations are renowned for the effective ways they use tools and technology to

drive business," observes Powell. "Canadian businesses have often been reluctant to make these same investments in technology. London Drugs and the H Y Louie Group, however, have always been technology driven. For us, buying a corporate aircraft was the obvious thing to do in order to maximize efficiency and grow our business."



President of LAS and London Drugs Wynne Powell believes in investing in technology. After surveying the business jet market, he zeroed in on the Learjet 45 as the best option for his company.

Flight department evolution

While the initial plan was to acquire an aircraft purely for corporate purposes, Powell thought it made better longterm sense to back up corporate applications with charter. Compared with the typical older Lear and Citation charter aircraft working out of YVR, LAS's new Lear 45, with its elegant green leather interior, Airshow Network and MagnaStar digital phones, immediately became popular with the local charter market and even with those who had not chartered before.

With aircraft utilization running at about 35% corporate and 65% charter, LAS was soon in the market for a 2nd Lear 45. As usual, they wanted the aircraft immediately and they wanted it fitted out to be identical to the initial Lear 45.

"We found someone who had Lear 45 hull number 088 on order and who was willing to sell," recalls Powell. "Seven months after putting our 1st Lear 45 into service we had our 2nd identically outfitted Lear 45 on the flightline."

LAS charter business has been strong, ranging from shuttling



Chief Pilot and Ops Mgr Mike Krall brought more than 20 yrs of Learjet flying experience to LAS when he joined the company.

Hollywood actors to Los Angeles and back to a recent 15-day Lear 45 charter to Central America and the Galápagos islands. With charter business growing by leaps and bounds, and requests for trips as far afield as Asia and Europe, it wasn't long before LAS began considering the addition of a widebody corporate jet. Last year a Bombardier Continental was ordered for delivery in 2005. And just last May the company placed an order for a Challenger 604.

"Nobody has ever chartered widebody corporate aircraft out of YVR but we believe a market exists," explains Powell. "Our purchase of the Challenger 604, which we hope to receive in Feb 2002, was a quick deal resulting from a compelling need to look after our customers. It will give us a 3950-nm range with only an 8% to 10% variable operating cost premium over the Continental."

Pilot lifestyles

When hiring new pilots, Chief Pilot Mike Krall looks for a minimum of 3000 hrs TT, 500 hrs multi-engine PIC and an ATP.

"The Lear 45 is a very sophisticated aircraft, so it's an advantage to have jet experience and a back-

ground in glass flightdecks when you come to work here," points out Krall. "In the past, all of the pilots we've hired had Learjet time. Our most recent 2 new-hires were test cases of a sort. Mark Wittig and Steven Inotai came in with about minimum time and neither had glass or jet experience."

So far, the new-hires have adapted well to the Lear 45, although the initial type rating training procedure at FlightSafety Tucson was a rigorous test for both.

"It was a big jump going to a full EFIS flightdeck with the UNS1C FMS," recalls Wittig, who joined LAS in Nov 2000 with 3800 hrs TT and a background flying water bombers. "But the workload decreases the more you fly the Lear 45 and the better you get at assimilating all the information from the panel."

Inotai also joined in Nov 2000 with 3400 hrs TT and a background flying older Raytheon King Airs and Shorts 360s. He concurs that the upgrade was hard but rewarding. "I love the job and I love flying the Lear 45," says Inotai. "The initial training was very thorough, but this is a very pilot-friendly airplane once you're used to it."

After a successful interview with LAS and completion of initial training at FlightSafety Tucson, a new-hire pilot returns to YVR for company indoctrination and 25 hrs IOE (initial operating experience) with a senior captain before being let loose as a fully-productive FO. When upgrading to captain, after a minimum of 1 year and 500 hrs with LAS, the pilot will go through a left-seat refresher course at FlightSafety followed by another 25

hrs IOE with a senior captain.

LAS pay policy is to be competitive in both salary and benefits. Pilots in this flight department currently fly about 40 hrs a month on 6-days-on, 3-days-off schedules, although this is expected to increase to 50 flying hrs a month in the future. Job benefits include uniforms, an employer contributory retirement plan, full health and dental coverage and a discount when shopping at London Drugs.

LAS does its own flightplanning inhouse. Outside of North America, however, SkyPlan of Calgary AB is contracted to assist in overseas arrangements. Lear 45 utilization is currently running some 525 hrs per aircraft. However, this is expected to increase to 800 hrs annually as operations mature. LAS's Lear 45s are RVSM qualified and company pilots are undergoing their RVSM training.

LAS operations

A typical trip for the London Drugs division of the H Y Louie Group might be a 1 to 3-day mission with multiple stops throughout western Canada visiting store locations. Full economy airline fares in Canada are so high that it's usually cheaper, on the basis of cost of air tickets alone, to send 5 or more employees by Lear 45 rather than on Air Canada. Additionally, a Lear 45 trip out of YVR to YXS (Prince George BC) and on to YYC (Calgary AB) with a store-visit stop in YLW (Kelowna BC) can be accomplished in a single 7 am to 9 pm business day, further saving on travel costs and maintaining employee morale.

"It's a win-win situation with the



Capt Cris Simpson and FO Mark Wittig, in the cockpit of one of the company's Learjet 45s, prepare for a 2 hr 20 min launch from YVR (Vancouver Intl BC) to LAX (Los Angeles CA). LAS pilots typically fly 40-50 hrs a month.



Capt Terry Batyi recently completed a Learjet 45 charter trip to the Galápagos Islands with stops in BRO (Brownsville TX), GYE (Guayaquil, Ecuador) and SJO (San José, Costa Rica).

Lear 45," observes Powell. "We win on the cost perspective with the efficiency of this aircraft and we win from a corporate culture perspective in reducing the hardships and time involved with travel. Corporate aircraft are a great investment if you use them wisely."

H Y Louie corporate missions with the Lear 45s range from travel to major business centers all over North America to ice-encrusted runways in Canada's wintry north.

"The Lear 45 handles like a dream even in severe ice conditions," notes Krall. "We landed at strips in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan last winter that were contaminated with ice and snow. But with its bigger wheels and carbon fiber brakes, the Lear 45 handles even better than the Lear 35 in those circumstances."

On the charter front, missions have ranged from a 3-day 15-stop project throughout western Canada to the recent Galápagos charter. Capts Mike Krall and Terry Batyi were in charge of the Galápagos expedition, which was accomplished via fuel stops in BRO (Brownsville TX), SJO (San José, Costa Rica) and GYE (Guayaquil, Ecuador) outbound. Longest leg on this trip was the 4.4-hr sector from YVR to BRO. No services, fuel or ground power are normally available on the Galápagos. As a precaution, LAS had a 55-gal drum of Jet A ferried over to the islands and made the transfer to the Lear 45's wingtanks via a hand pump.

"Our Lear 45 performed extremely well throughout our trip to Central America and the Galápagos," notes Batyi. "It's a

wonderful aircraft to fly, with all the best features of the Lear 35 rolled up into one and then improved on."

Maintenance

Dir of Maintenance Ted Foster looks after line maintenance on his Lear 45s and is gearing up for the soon-to-be-delivered Challenger 604. Foster accomplishes A checks and troubleshooting inhouse while sending out B and C inspections to Learjet Tucson.

"Everything is under warranty at the moment but, as we accumulate more equipment and experience, we'll likely move into doing B checks," suggests Foster, who has a 20-year-plus background in maintaining Learjets. "Product support from Bombardier has been excellent and we haven't missed a trip yet."



FO Steven Inotai joined LAS in late 2000 with 3400 hrs of non-EFIS turboprop flight experience. He finds the Learjet 45 to be a particularly pilot-friendly aircraft.

Both 45s are outfitted with Airshow Network, Universal Navigation UNSIC FMS, Universal Navigation UniLink, Magnastar phones, TCAS II and flat panel monitors adaptable for powerpoint presentations. Modem plugs, along with AC power, are available at each seating position aboard these efficient offices-in-the-sky.

In the scheduling arena, Executive Asst Kathy McIntyre handles all Lear 45 corporate trip requests. LAS corporate aircraft are considered tools for all staff. Lear 45 trip requests are considered whenever there would be 5 or more passengers on board or if there's a specific or urgent need.



Dir of Maintenance Ted Foster looks forward to the arrival of the LAS Challenger 604 in Feb 2002. He currently accomplishes A checks on the Learjet 45s, and is preparing to begin performing B checks in-house.

Future directions

LAS is happy with its current fleet and looks forward with anticipation to both its Challenger 604 and Bombardier Continental. Depending on how intercontinental charter requirements play out, the flight department is willing to consider a larger aircraft, such as the Bombardier Global Express, so long as the acquisition can be justified.

"With the H Y Louie group, anything is possible if it makes business sense," says Powell. "We think the Global Express is a great aircraft but at the moment we feel we're making a reach in the YVR market with the Challenger 604. We run our business for the customer's benefit. If our customers want or need a specific type of aircraft, and they can make it cost affordable for us to invest in, we'll look at it."

As LAS grows in both corporate mission requirements and breadth of charter activities, pilot advancement and career opportunities within this flight department are sure to be very attractive.

"As our reputation and our fleet has grown, more pilots want to join us," adds Powell. "When I interview new pilots I tell them that we're a progressive company passionate about the industry and passionate about technology. We're going to take LAS beyond what people thought could be done at YVR. Although we're still starting our journey, we feel we're ahead of our business plan and we believe we've enlarged both the local charter market and local pilot opportunities."