

# FLYING PALACES —

*The largest luxury jets*

By Henry M. Holden



*The A380, the largest airliner in the world, is also the largest private luxury jet, coming in at over \$500-million. It is almost 74 metres long and has 50 percent more cabin space than the largest Boeing 747.*

**W**HEN AIR travel is in question, the rich and famous know how to fly – in their own luxury private jets.

Back in 1996, Boeing introduced the first “personal use” version of one of its commercial airliners, the \$30-million Boeing Business Jet (a reconfigured 737).

It was treated as the last word in spaciousness and luxury. Now, compared with competing luxury jets, a 737 looks like “just another aircraft”.

Equipped with interiors as luxurious as any five-star hotel, these private jets make the trips of their wealthy owners more comfortable and enjoyable.

But, luxury comes at a price. The Bombardier Global 5000 starts at about \$31-million, and the Gulfstream G650 runs a cool \$65-million. Airbus lists a price of \$68-million for its smallest single-aisle A318 and about \$245-million for the twin-aisle A350, which will debut in 2014. The company lists its new A380-double-decker at \$389.9-million before any luxury additions. In all, manufacturers sold 200 large luxury jets in 2011, including 17 Boeing and Airbus private jets.

As aircraft have become larger, their interiors have also changed greatly, incorporating the sumptuous and

eccentric amenities once found only on private yachts. The owner of one Boeing private jet painted a copy of the Sistine Chapel on its ceiling, while one has a library aboard. Another insisted on mounting a sculpture of his horse in the cabin of his jet. Many have pianos, and home theatres aboard.

If one were to rank the latest and best luxury private jets from one to ten, then American realtor Donald Trump and his Boeing 757 would come in at number 10.

Dallas Maverick’s basketball team’s Mark Cuban and his Boeing 767 would fall in the middle, and Saudi prince Al-waleed bin Talal with his behemoth Airbus A380 would rank as the Top Gun in the private luxury jet arena. The prince must have become bored with his \$200 million B-747 which may be why he ordered an A380 in 2003.

In between these extremes there are people such as Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkiah, better known as the Sultan of Brunei, who spent \$243-million on his B747-400. You do not have to be a sultan or a prince to have an expensive ride.

Hong Kong real estate tycoon, Joseph Lau, spent \$153-million on a private Boeing 747-8i VIP jet. However, he is not the only one who likes to fly in luxury.

In comparison, some may call these billionaires cheap skates. Movie mogul, Steven Spielberg, owns a \$50-million Dassault Falcon 7X, and if you are Mukesh Ambani, chairman of a Fortune Global 500 conglomerate, and worth an estimated \$22-billion, you can afford \$73-million to buy a flying hotel. And his Boeing Business Jet II certainly is that, with a thousand square feet, a bedroom, a boardroom, and an executive suite.

Vijay Mallya is chairman of the UB Group, which is an Indian conglomerate that owns, among other things, Kingfisher Airlines, bought an Airbus 318 Elite ACJ, for \$81-million.

## UNASHAMED OF EXCESS

Donald Trump, the publicity-seeking property mogul as we know has made, and lost, and made again, millions of dollars. So why shouldn’t he spend a little on himself? But how little is a little?

Trump recently upgraded from his Boeing 727 to Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen’s “old” Boeing 757. Trump paid \$100-million for the used airplane.

A few years ago Trump gave thought to running for US president. Generally, the presidential candidates lease a B757, so the speculation was that Trump wanted to

get the feel for what he hoped would be his future presidency. He got the airplane, which the media dubbed "Trump Force One", but not the job.

But, when you're Donald Trump, you live large, and need an airplane to match your larger-than-life personality. Trump is completely unashamed of excess. In this case, his new ride is about twice the size of his 727. It seats 43, has a 16-hour non-stop flying range, and is powered by two Rolls Royce engines. Each sleeper seat is equipped with an audio-visual system, and the dining area has comfortable seating for a small group of guests.

There is a guest room completely wrapped in wood and features a large home theatre system. The guest bedroom has a mohair-covered divan which converts to a full size bed for extended trips. The ceilings are all lined in suede.

Trump's master bedroom, dressed in cream with gold accents, is covered with yards and yards of elegant gold silk adorning the cabin walls. It has a wooden desk and electric shades for a peaceful slumber. A custom headboard as well as a comforter were created to compliment it. For size comparison, his bedroom has no fewer than seven cabin windows.

This bedroom also has a home theatre complex, custom designed pillows, and the Trump family crest embroidered on them, which also appears on all the leather headrests on the aircraft.

The master bathroom connecting to the bedroom has a circular shower and 24-carat gold-plated fixtures, and sink. The main cabin shows rows of wide, cushioned seats and cream couches that swivel to face boardroom tables or flat-screen televisions.

By comparison, a typical commercial 757 seats 186 to 289 passengers and the seatbelt buckles and other accessories



*For perspective, the boardroom and table takes up less than the space of six windows, and fits neatly just under the letters "US" on the airplane – see below.*

such as the lavatory sink are not 24k gold plated.

Other notable features on Trump's jet include a 57" TV in the "media room," a DVD storage system of 1 000 movies, Trump's personal DVR, a private master suite for Trump, and a guest suite with a full bed, bathroom and more.

It also comes fully loaded with the most advanced "glass" cockpit flight avionics. With that kind of technology, who needs the window seat?

Oh, did we mention that Trump's second favourite ride for short flights is a Sikorsky S-76C helicopter which starts at \$11-million and rivals Marine One, the US presidential helicopter.

#### TRASH BAGS TO BILLIONS

The Mark Cuban we know today is a rich sophisticated business entrepreneur, but

who knew that this self-made billionaire sold trash bags door-to-door at the age of 12? His hard work and business acumen have made him a man with net worth of \$2,6-billion and the founder of HDNet, Broadcast.com and MicroSolutions, which he sold for \$6-million.

Billionaire Cuban, who purchased the Dallas Mavericks basketball team for \$285-million from Ross Perot, also owns a healthy fleet of private jets. His private fleet includes a Gulfstream VSP and a Boeing 767.

Cuban broke a Guinness Record in October 1999, when he purchased the \$50-million Gulfstream V as the "largest single e-commerce transaction." In addition to other lavish upgrades, the 767 is fitted with custom made seats that are large enough to accommodate the tallest team player.

*Trump's "Trump Force One" jet is 47,2 metres long and comes with 24k gold-plated bathroom accessories and seatbelt buckles.*



## SAUDI PRINCE TOP GUN

Airbus today operates the world's largest passenger airliner, the A380. One copy of this behemoth double-decker jetliner is owned by a single individual, Saudi prince Alwaleed bin Talal, the chairman of Kingdom Holding Company, a major investor in Citigroup.

The Western-educated prince is known as the Warren Buffett of the Middle East because of his reputation as a shrewd investor. He also owns seven percent of the Rupert Murdoch News Corporation.

According to Forbes, the prince has a net worth of \$18-billion. The converted Airbus A380 holds the title of the world's largest private jet. The same A380 model is used by Singapore Airlines and Emirates normally given to three-class seating of 550 to all economy class of about 850 passengers, and can fly 8 000 miles before refuelling.

The prince and his guests who enjoy five-star luxury treatment, do not need 800 seats. Instead, he removed them to make room for opulent amenities.

According to a spokesman for Design Q, the company working on the interior, they installed all of the wishes of the prince. "This is the most up-to-date model you can get and the largest civil aircraft ever. It's huge – half again as big as a 747."

The Airbus was delivered to the prince 'green' – a basic airframe ready to be furnished to the client's desires.

It is the most expensive personal jet in the world, with a final price in excess of \$500-million, including the cost of outfitting it with one-of-a-kind amenities.

This flying yacht includes five private suites with king-size beds, a stable for horses, a pen for hawks, and a garage for his diamond-studded handmade Mercedes SL600, and his exclusive \$4.8-million handmade diamond Ducati motorcycle. The prince is the owner of not 10 or 20 but more than 300 of the most exotic and luxurious vehicles ever built.

The plane has a dedicated prayer area, in which computer-generated prayer mats move and always point toward Mecca.

Besides private suites there is a full-size boardroom for mid-air business meetings. It features a large Perspex table which doubles as a huge touch screen. There are also 20 smaller private rooms or 'sleepers' – the equivalent of First Class seats – for extra guests.

Just outfitting the cavernous interior with the little touches that make an airplane a home, such as mahogany panelling, gold-plated fixtures, a Jacuzzi



*The uncluttered and comfortable cockpit of the Airbus A380 has the latest in "glass" avionics.*

and a screening room, cost the prince a mere \$20-million.

The flying palace A380 boasts the equivalent of three tennis courts' worth of floor space, while the lowest cargo deck has been turned into a relaxation zone.

### MAGIC CARPETS, STEAM ROOMS

The belly of the A380, is equipped with various rooms, the "Wellbeing Room," appropriately called "The Magic Carpet" is a giant screen allowing guests to see what they are flying over.

As if in virtual reality, they can crawl from the Magic Carpet seating area to the floor where scented breezes including forest and sea air give the impression of flying. Sounds are like an up-scaled version of the Disney World ride "Flight."

Next to the Magic Carpet is a Hamam, or steam room, which is lined with marble only two millimetres thick to keep the weight down, as well as a sensory area for individual treatments.

A dazzling main white spiral staircase as well as a lift will travel the plane's three floors and lower on to the tarmac to act as a private entrance for the prince and his guests. Between the private quarters upstairs, and the tarmac is a concert hall.

The concert hall contains a stage featuring a grand piano, acoustic panelling and seating for an audience of ten. It will host big-name performers hired for the flight.

Upon a guest's arrival, a lift drops to the runway, and a red carpet unfurls, with downlights to "give the impression of turning up at the Oscars," according to Design Q. Not surprisingly, the Wellbeing room, the Hamam and the concert hall are right over the centre of gravity on this super jumbo jet.

The new airliner joins the prince's stable of private jets, including a modified Boeing 747, an Airbus 321 and a Hawker Siddeley 125.

The prince is also the proud owner of a 280-foot super yacht 5KR, formerly owned by Donald Trump, which was featured in James Bond film, "Never Say Never Again."

Design Q, says the A380 is "not only the most luxurious aircraft in existence, but also reflects the cultural values and status of its owner." This has been noted in the 2009 Guinness World Records as the largest private jet in the world.

Still, there are limits to the features than can be installed in jets. There are two standards for cabin design. Commercial airliners have to adhere to stringent safety standards. It really limits the type of materials and configuration an airline can have.

If you have a personal luxury aircraft, you can do pretty much what you like on board which is what billionaires do. But as opulent as these flying yachts get, all the money in the world can't buy a swimming pool or a fireplace on the aircraft. →