

Peter Maurer President, Diamond Aircraft Industries, Inc.

VLJM: Peter, we understand you've been with Diamond since 1993, much of it in a technical capacity. Tell us about your road from there to the Presidency.

PETER MAURER: I started as Quality and Certification Manager, a position I held at MBB Helicopter, prior to joining Diamond. I took on progressively more responsibility, first as chief engineer, then overall responsibility for all operations and finally I became President just over 5 years ago.

Diamond began as Hoffman Flugzeugbau, which was founded in 1987 to produce the H36 Dimona motorglider. How has this fundamental knowledge influenced the present-day aircraft production at Diamond?

Yes, Diamond's roots go back to the H36, which was an all-composite, fully certified motorglider, quite remarkable when you consider that this was over a quarter century ago. Things didn't really get moving until the Dries family took ownership in 1991, when the Katana project was launched, followed by the DA40, the DA42 and now the D-JET.

Obviously there are no common parts between the current and original aircraft, however the basic construction techniques are quite similar. Much of the production process has been automated and optimized, but the principle of creating two structural shells and bonding them to an internal structure remains to this day. Aerodynamically, all of our aircraft owe a bit to that original motorglider, with efficient airfoils, low drag airframes and high aspect ratio-low drag wing planforms.

The Diamond line of aircraft covers the spectrum. What planes are presently in manufacture?

Our full line include the HK36 motorglider, the 2-seat DA20, the 4-seat DA40 with three powerplant choices including the turbo-diesel, the DA42-tdi, and now the D-JET.

Growing from roots in motorgliders to turbojet production is quite an accomplishment. The D-JET was announced in 2003 and has been a huge success. What led to the corporate commitment at Diamond to the Very Light Jet program?

In 2002, with the DA40 in production and the DA42 well along in its development, we were discussing future projects, just as we always do! At that time we were actually bouncing around the idea of a larger single engine propeller airplane, when the idea of a single engine, altitude limited, easy to fly jet was floated by Christian Dries, Diamond's CEO. We are a privately owned and entrepreneurial company, so work immediately started on the concept. It was introduced in 2003 and the airplane first flew in April 2006. The concept seems to have hit the mark, with very positive feedback from potential owners, current customers, media, and even our competitors.

The D-JET has many design innovations gleaned from years of experience in aircraft design and manufacture. Describe the D-JET for us.

It is very large inside, it is very easy to fly, it exudes quality and design detail, it is equipped with state of the art equipment, it is designed for pilots of average experience and up to four passengers, it has three spacious baggage compartments, it is low in acquisition and operating cost, goes nearly anywhere and it's beautiful. Think of it as a high-end 370mph SUV.

It is all carbon composite, powered by the Williams FJ33, equipped with the Garmin G1000 with two 12" PFD's and one 15" MFD, integrated FMS and Flight Control System. It cruises at 315 kts, carries up to 1740 lbs of fuel and has a useful load of 2240 lbs. This allows the optimum flexibility of either long range or high payload. The aircraft is fully loaded at 1.38M US\$, with notable options being the BRS parachute and WX radar.

We call the D-JET a Personal Light Jet. Easy to own and easy to operate, we think the D-JET could well be a defining milestone airplane, the one that brought jet power to private pilots.

The D-JET is designed to operate under 25,000 feet. What prompted that design decision?

Most single pilots currently operating at the higher flight levels are professional pilots, with very few exceptions. There is a world of difference between FL250 and FL410. Aircraft stability and performance margins, reaction time in the case of sudden cabin pressure loss - everything is far more critical at higher altitudes. Add to that the fact that most short to medium length flights are actually performed at lower altitudes for practical reasons (climb time, ATC, etc.), and the answer becomes self-evident.

In our view, we didn't want to compromise comfort, i.e. cabin volume, and affordability for a part of the performance envelope that is not needed for most practical operations. If someone absolutely believes they need to fly above 40,000', there are plenty of new and used business jets that can do that, but none can offer the combination of comfort and affordability of the D-JET and we wanted to access the broadest possible market segment.

Also, consider the insurance factor. An altitude-limited, docile aircraft will be insurable at reasonable rates. High altitude single pilot proficiency will require a very high level of proficiency to attract reasonable insurance.

It appears that aviators can start with Diamond aircraft and stay with the brand as their experience level and aviation experience grows.

Yes, it is entirely possible to learn to fly in a Diamond and progress all the way through to the D-JET. This approach worked well for Cessna and Piper in the 60s and 70s and I think it holds true today as well. The only difference is that the development of a complete line of modern high tech aircraft is very costly and thus prohibitive to most companies. Without saying too much, if one observes what Diamond has achieved in the last decade or so, it is likely that our line will continue to grow.

How can the readers of Very Light Jet Magazine get information about purchasing D-JET and other aircraft in the Diamond family?

They can contact us directly at 1-888-359-3220 or go to www.diamondaircraft.com for lots of great information and links to our Diamond Regional Distribution Centers, which can provide local service and support, from first demo flight through delivery, throughout the ownership experience, and hopefully the next Diamond aircraft.

What is your vision of the entire Very Light Jet group in the year 2010?

At this point there have been many announcements, and I think the time between now and then will be filled with all these announcements trying to become reality. Obviously, Cessna and Eclipse are leading with aircraft that are getting very near delivery. I would think that Diamond and Adam will come next, followed by Embraer, Honda, Cirrus and Piper, not necessarily in that order. Possibly some of these may not come to fruition, some may change along the way and maybe some new models and manufacturers will join the fray.

The bottom line clearly is that by 2010 there will be VLJs from several different manufacturers in the sky, serving the private, corporate and airtaxi markets. The big questions of course are how many, from which manufacturer, and how rapid the growth of the airtaxi industry will be. The D-JET is designed for volume production, it meets a multitude of missions, it is affordable and easy to fly. We certainly think it will play a big part.

Thank you, Peter Maurer, for your contribution to the Very light Jet Magazine executive interview series.