

Michimasa Fujino CEO, Honda Aircraft Company

VLJM: We are here with Michimasa Fujino, CEO of Honda Aircraft Company and leader of the HondaJet development team. Mr. Fujino, welcome to our Executive Interview series. We are here to talk about the HondaJet, but first let's discuss your passion for aviation, your education, and how we find you as chief of this fantastic part of aviation history.

MICHIMASA FUJINO: I majored in aerospace engineering in the Japanese college (Tokyo University) and graduated as an aerospace engineer. Because there was no exciting job in aerospace in Japan, so I decided to go into automotive industry which is the most dynamic industry in Japan. But two years later, after I joined Honda, the opposite happened, because Honda starts airplane research, and I wound up in an aircraft project. Honda sent five young engineers to US in 1986 and I was one of them. That was the beginning of my aviation career and that is when my passion started.

The development of the HondaJet has been closely watched by many. The demographic studies conducted on the distribution of the aircraft were extensive. Would you care to discuss sales forecast for the plane and the ultimate global distribution?

We conducted many market surveys and many business models studies, not only of direct sales but also of distribution sales. The current business jet industry is leaning toward the direct sales model for business jet distribution. I always thought that the very light jet commands a personal level of service and personal experience that is extremely important to the customer. I tried to simulate the similar concept used by automobile dealers who distribute to the individual customers. This is kind of a new concept - to distribute the individual business jets to the customer through dealers. As for fleet sales of jets, we used direct sales from Honda aircraft.

Will the distributorship of the HondaJet through dealers also coincide with service?

Basically we divided the United States into five regions. Each region will have a service center and each dealer will have a service center in the future which is to be exclusively used by HondaJet.

When do you anticipate certification and delivery of the plane?

We just applied for certification October 11, and we anticipate deliveries three to four years after our application. First delivery of HondaJet is expected to begin in 2010.

Tell us about the very progressive engine mounting design and the high-tech thinking and engineering that went into it.

This is a very new concept because many airframe designers think that the over-wing concept is not a good idea. There had been some problems with a similar concept, but ours is much more advanced than previously tried. By locating the engine at the optimum position relative to the wing, we can minimize the aerodynamic interference. This new configuration gives lower drag at high speed by reducing the shock wave.

Tell us about the wing design.

We have developed a new concept, low drag wing that is very insensitive to the contamination of the leading edge.

What is your target market for the HondaJet?

From our market survey, more than 50% will be going out to owner/pilots and maybe 40-50% to air charter and corporate customer. We have a lot of demand from air-taxi and fractional ownership so we may have to change our forecasts slightly, but at the moment about 50% will be owner/pilots.

What is your view of the training situation in the Very Light Jet market?

Training is very important, especially in Very Light Jets. Pilot skills are an issue and we are currently evaluating what is best and our options are under careful consideration.

Can you give us more information about decisions that went into the cockpit design, tail design, and aspects of the

airframe?

We are evaluating all areas and are evaluating new concepts. We are further improving cockpit design from human interface standpoint and are getting close to the final concepts, taking into consideration new ways to fly. As for airframe, we are further refining design to simplify manufacturing process for cost and quality improvement.

How can our readers of Very Light Jet Magazine find out more about purchasing the HondaJet?
Visit our website at hondajet.honda.com.

Thank you, Mr. Fujino, for being a part of our Very Light Jet Magazine executive interview series.
My pleasure.