

Safety, Security, and Flawless Execution

An Interview with James Chitty, Chief Executive Officer, Talon Air

EDITORS' NOTE *James Chitty has been in the field of aviation for over a decade. Chitty recognized the need for a new approach to private jet charter and founded PlaneClear, a private aviation charter company, in 2008. He had designed a program that offered access to what was traditionally kept under wraps by other charter companies: pilot hours, aircraft age, maintenance schedules, and third-party auditor ratings. In October 2016, PlaneClear merged with Apollo Jets, a partnership that bonded the two forward-thinking companies looking to stay ahead of the curve. As one company, they are committed to delivering innovation to their clients and simplifying their travel. In July 2018, Apollo Jets acquired Talon Air LLC, a Farmingdale NY (FRG) based full-service management company and repair station. Chitty immediately assumed the role of CEO and continues to run the day-to-day business. Since the acquisition, the fleet has grown to 40+ aircraft ranging from the Hawker 800XP up to the Gulfstream 550. Chitty has also served as Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Liberty Equities of America and led retail sales for many years in the finance industry. He completed his studies at the State University of New York College at Cortland.*



James Chitty

experience by controlling a fleet. Talon had grown substantially since 1999 and had added a full-service FAA approved Part 145 Repair Station with robust capabilities. Its headquarters in FRG had grown to two large hangars with ample office space to serve as its dispatch and 24/7 operations center. In addition, they had a young fleet made up mostly of mid- and super-mid-size jets. This was the pedigree Apollo Jets was looking for.

In July 2018, Apollo closed its transaction and continued to expand the business. Although Apollo and Talon operate as separate businesses, they are sister companies with Talon serving as the wholesale arm and Apollo as the retail arm. I am proud to say that when we arrived, Talon Air had less than 40 full-time pilots; today's figure hovers around 125. The fleet we acquired consisted of 17 airplanes. Today, even with

the pandemic, our fleet has grown to 44 managed aircraft including 18 heavy jets (several Gulfstreams, Globals, and Falcons). We are consistently top 15 annually in hours flown. We are projecting to add 10-13 aircraft to our managed fleet by 2023.

The secret to our success is our continued boutique approach to customer service. Our airplane owners have direct access to our leadership team. Our current customers are our biggest referral source for not only charter clients, but also managed aircraft.

In April 2021, we were acquired by the largest on demand provider in the world, Vista Global Holding. Although Talon will continue to operate independently, we leverage the buying power of our group of companies – VistaJet and XO – and Vista's operating partners – XOJET Aviation, GMJ Air Shuttle, Red Wing Aviation, Western Air Charter, JetSelect, and, of course, Talon Air – to provide significant cost savings to our clients with items

Will you provide an overview of Talon Air and what have been the keys to the strength of the company?

Talon Air was founded in 1999 by an aircraft owner and charter client seeking an alternative to cookie-cutter aircraft charter options. Talon's founder, an airplane owner himself, recognized the need for a true "customer service first" approach. At the time, the industry was run by aviation professionals who lacked the forward-looking perspective of the airplane owners and charter clients they service. Talon started as a regional player based in Long Island at Republic Airport in Farmingdale, New York. We specialized in servicing the affluent clientele of the Gold Coast. Over time, Talon's footprint grew with remote locations at additional airports across the country, including places such as South Florida; Vail, Colorado; and Scottsdale, Arizona.

In March 2017, one of the largest charter brokers in the country, Apollo Jets, recognized the need to further enhance their clients'



Gulfstream IV-SP



Interior of a Gulfstream V

such as fuel costs, insurance, training, labor rates, etc. Perhaps even more important than the savings are preferred training slots, the group buying power for parts, negotiated maintenance slots, and preferred terms with all the large vendors.

Talon is well-positioned to continue our strategic growth while retaining its commitment and partnership with our airplane owners.

How do you describe the Talon Air experience?

The Talon Air experience focuses on safety, security, and flawless execution. Whether you are a charter customer and have meetings in three cities on the same day or you want to surprise your family with a last-minute vacation, Talon Air will deliver an unmatched private jet charter experience. If you are an airplane owner looking for management and maintenance services, you will always have direct access to our leadership team and actual decision-makers, not to a customer service desk. We anticipate our clients' needs and pay careful attention to every detail of their flight. Our mission is to provide the safest, most thoughtful, and professional private jet charter service available.

Talon Air offers jet aircraft management services for both Part 135 and Part 91 aircraft. Our aviation professionals handle all your flight planning, scheduling, and trip details. We provide full accounting, maintenance, operations, and human resources support for each owner to ensure that you maximize the value of your investment and your time. Our goal is to structure a private jet management program to safeguard you and your asset while enhancing the benefits of aircraft ownership.

Will you discuss the Talon Air fleet offerings?

Talon Air currently manages 44 aircraft and experienced over 100 percent fleet growth from 2017 to 2022. Our managed fleet ranges

from turbo-prop King Air 200 all the way up to the ultra-long-range Gulfstream 550 and Global 6000 aircraft. In 2020, our team launched a sales and acquisition department that truly allows us to grow with our clients, from charter customers to full airplane owners. We believe this approach truly aligns our interest and creates a partnership between the airplane owner and the management company.

How did Talon Air adapt the way it works to address the challenges caused by the global pandemic?

The pandemic brought a whole new segment of flyers into our space. We have

always been a customer service first business, but now there is a whole new health and safety aspect to our business that has taken precedence. Talon has and always will follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of State, and the World Health Organization (WHO). Our team also closely monitors any travel restrictions. Our client assurance team reviews domestic and international travel mandates on a daily basis to ensure compliance with evolving requirements.

Talon Air places a priority on safety. Will you highlight Talon Air's commitment to safety, and do you feel that this is a differentiator for the company?

Many preach a safety-first approach, but we believe that to have a true safety culture you must invest in your team. We continue to enhance the processes in place to report, track and mitigate prospective challenges. Talon Air is proud to claim the highest independent, industry-recognized safety ratings of ARG/US Platinum, Wyvern Wingman, and IS-BAO III Certification. Talon has also passed rigorous EASA audit standards and is authorized to conduct operations throughout Europe. Additionally, Talon Air's Safety Management System (SMS) has been accepted into the FAA's SMS Voluntary Program since 2017 (one of the first in the country). The program is documented in the SMS Manual and uses ARGUS/PRISM for its Safety Database, Risk Management, Safety, Injury/Workman's Comp and Hazard reporting.

Is it important for Talon Air to provide travel-related services to its clients when on the ground?

Absolutely. We understand that time is precious, and we aim to provide elevated service by coordinating all aspects of a client's travel before, during and after their flight. Most companies in our space will set up ground



Interior of a Gulfstream IV

transportation, luxury car rentals, catering, and lodging. To us, that's a given. Our true value is getting ahead of potential issues. We routinely work with our handling teams to acquire landing permits in challenging locations and set up departure and arrival slots. This is where the experience of a truly global operator shows, having the reach and leverage to ask the right questions to the right partners to ensure a seamless trip. Our team handles all of the client's trip logistics, from start to finish.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

It seems like transparency is a very popular word as of late, but it's something I believe in and has been a focal point of my management style for many years. Even in a leadership role, it's okay to not always have all the answers. Our team and people respect the person who has to dig a little deeper and circle back, as long as you are upfront and transparent. This has never been more evident than in the past few years when we all were navigating and experiencing unprecedented situations. It's important for any leader to be clear and direct, even if that means not having an immediate solution.

What are your priorities for Talon Air as you look to the future?

We want to continue the fleet growth trajectory we have had since 2017, but more importantly we want to enhance the



Interior of a Hawker 4000

airplane owner experience from their first interaction with Talon Air. Whether you're a client looking into buying a plane for the first time or an experienced airplane owner looking for professional management, we want Talon to always provide the most value to the entire process.

The only way to do this is to continue to invest in our team. We continue to work to retain and, when necessary, recruit and train the smartest aviation professionals in the world. This will sound cliché, but with airplane management it truly "takes a village." Our priority is to continue growing our village to the best in the world. ●



Hawker 4000