



INTECH

Airbus Officially Launches ACJ TwoTwenty

Less than two years after its official entry in the manufacturer's catalog, the A220 has a corporate version, the ACJ TwoTwenty. This version has already been a great success since its launch, with six firm orders already booked by Airbus.



By Frédéric Vergnères
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A 73 m² cabin

To develop the ACJ TwoTwenty program, Airbus Corporate Jet called on Comlux's experience in both operations and cabin layout. In less than two years, the manufacturer and the operator/industrialist will have combined their know-how to offer the market a «turnkey» aircraft. «The product strategy has been to offer a platform with greater autonomy than the commercial version of the A220, while at the same time having a solid partnership with Comlux for the cabin layout,» says Benoit Defforge. For Richard Gaona, Chairman and CEO of Comlux, «this partnership allows us to benefit from our experience as an operator, particularly in the choice of a layout that must be simple to maintain and easy to use». The 73 m² cabin, which can accommodate up to 18 passengers, offers maximum flexibility through six distinct zones. The interior design, proposed by the manufacturer, is the result of a long reflection by Sylvain Mariat, ACJ Head of creative design. «For the ACJTwoTwenty, there was a real collaboration between the designer and the engineers. Sylvain was free to choose to work on his design while taking into account the requirements of ease of maintenance and installation of the elements,» emphasizes the Comlux manager before adding: «This design allows us to offer 90 different combinations with a choice of three trends: Avant-Garde, Timeless and Quintessence. The interior design of the ACJ TwoTwenty features new technologies by introducing a control system for cabin elements such as sound, image or temperature via a mobile application installed on his personal smartphone. The goal is to make home automation as simple as possible,» says Gaona.

The manufacturer is planning a lower cabin pressurization than the cabin version (equivalent to 6,000ft - 1,830m) as well as a new ambient humidifier system, especially for long-haul flights. On the connectivity side, the ACJ TwoTwenty will be equipped with a wi-fi connectivity system based on the Ku band, which is more efficient. «The TwoTwenty is a key element of the ACJ range,» said the head of the ACJ range, as it completes the unique portfolio of devices for the industry. In addition to the aircraft and its performance, the portfolio at ACJ can offer a range of cabin sizes from 73m² for the ACJTwoTwenty to 300m² for the ACJ350, a must.

To achieve a range of 5,650 nm/10,500 km, enabling it to fly non-stop between London and Los Angeles, the European aircraft manufacturer had to integrate five additional tanks (Aircraft Center Tanks), representing 5.5 metric tons of additional kerosene compared with the original version. In fact, the maximum takeoff weight (MTOW) will be increased in order to carry the extra fuel, and to pass the ETOPS 180 standard without constraint, without sacrificing ergonomics and cabin space. Incidentally, the manufacturer, which plans to take off its aircraft in less than 1,600 m, also indicates a 25% reduction in fuel consumption and a 50% reduction in noise compared with competing aircraft already in service.



At a time when the aeronautical sector is in the throes of one of the worst crises in its history, Airbus is optimistic about the future. Following the announcement at the end of September of several projects for a carbon-neutral aircraft, the European manufacturer unveiled a corporate version of its A220-100, the ACJ TwoTwenty. This version is preferred to the -300 for obvious strategic reasons compared to its current range. The aircraft manufacturer is counting on this aircraft to bounce back in the business aviation sector, which despite the crisis, remains buoyant, especially in the large cabin and long-range segment. According to Benoit Defforge, President of Airbus Corporate Jet (ACJ), this segment «has represented between 20 and 30% of the market over the last ten years». Even if the context seems to have become more difficult in recent months, the CEO indicates that «The Covid crisis has not prevented us from continuing to pursue our strategy. In view of the aircraft's entry into the Airbus catalog in 2018, this version was launched fairly quickly. During this very short period of time, we nevertheless wanted to launch a quality product but above all, a «package» including the aircraft with its cabin design. This is something new at ACJ».



Comlux, the key element

In view of its performance, the ACJ TwoTwenty should, however, break out of the usual corporate jetliner pattern. The Canadian-origin jetliner is, according to the head of the Airbus subsidiary, «a product whose positioning does not exist on the market today.» Due to its specific features and a price that should range an equivalent price or even lower than top-of-the-range business jets fully equipped, the TwoTwenty could therefore phagocitate sales from traditional business jet manufacturers in the «extra large» and «long range» segment, such as Gulfstream with its G650ER or Bombardier with its Global 7500. We have no intention of competing with these manufacturers. But we do have a complementary and different offer. «Our aircraft today meets 98% of the needs expressed by our customers, namely an intercontinental aircraft with a large cabin volume,» said Mr. Defforge. In addition to the pure business jet market, the ACJ TwoTwenty should also interest a significant number of owners who want to part with their Boeing BBJ1 or even potentially replace a BBJ Max. But the new ACJ is of particular interest to major operators in the sector, including Comlux, a long-time Airbus customer that has acquired the first two production aircraft. According to the operator, the two aircraft, which will be based in Malta, will operate for the

company's charter requirements, but will also be used by Airbus and Comlux Group as demonstration aircraft. In addition to this contract, Comlux Group has also become a key partner in the project, as it has been awarded responsibility for the cabin outfitting of the first fifteen ACJ TwoTwenty aircraft. The work was carried out in the United States, on the group's site in Indianapolis. In fact, Airbus has already indicated that it does not intend to sell any aircraft in «green» configuration, in order to optimize the sales price of its aircraft sold with its cabin layout. «The partnership agreement between Airbus and Comlux for the first fifteen aircraft enables us to offer a very attractive price, on a par with the very high-end business jets. Our goal is not to stop at these fifteen cabins, however, but to go beyond them in order to guarantee the aircraft's success on the market.» In order to lower its prices, the manufacturer has defined in advance all possible interior design solutions in a module format that can be interchanged in the six cabin living spaces, each of which is of the same size. This advanced engineering management will thus enable Comlux «to guarantee not only a fitting cycle of less than 9 months but also a competitive price,» says the Comlux manager.



Will Airbus succeed where Embraer has failed with its Lineage 1000 in a market segment positioned between high-end business jets and Corporate Jet liners? The ACJ TwoTwenty has real assets in terms of price, cabin design and performance, making it a real «Game Changer» in a market that is always on the lookout for new products. In a difficult market context for the airline industry, and especially in a highly competitive sector such as business aviation, the partnership with Comlux makes sense and could prove the European manufacturer right. To be continued. ■

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