



JACK ATLEY

Cessna Citation X — 10 for 10

The Cessna Citation X is synonymous with the word “speed”. Contributor **Benn Marks** explains why.

WHEN IT ENTERED SERVICE IN 1996, the sleek, highly advanced Citation jet was acknowledged as being the fastest business jet in the world, period. It eclipsed all competitors — regardless of class — and boasted a maximum cruising speed of Mach 0.92. In fact, after the retirement of the Concorde in 2003, the Citation X was considered the fastest civil aircraft in the world before it briefly relinquished the title to a rival company’s design in 2012.

However, the Citation X’s younger, ever-so-slightly larger sibling, the Citation X+, reclaimed the title for Cessna in 2014, something which it has held ever since (the Citation X+’s maximum speed being a very impressive Mach 0.935). As for the original leading edge, clean-sheet design Citation X — it comprehensively demolished any doubts about whether Cessna could design competitively fast jets when it arrived on the business aviation scene over 20 years ago. And the reality is it can still hold its own with the best of them today. In fact, in terms of raw speed alone, the original Citation X model is still regarded as one of the fastest civil jets in the world. It also just happens to be a consummate performer in the midsize segment, as well as a stunning design.

Many examples of the impressive jet can be found operating around the world. In Australia, JetCity is one such company to have a Citation X on its books flying customers near the speed of sound in luxury since 2008.

“You don’t buy a Citation X to go slow. If you want to go slow you buy a hot air balloon, that’s the thing. The people who buy these airplanes, and the people who charter these airplanes, want to go

fast. It was designed to cross the US continent faster than anything else, and that was its primary role,” JetCity managing director and chief pilot, Lorne Cole, says. “And as far as modern corporate aircraft go, this one handles beautifully. Because it was a clean-sheet design, and so much time and effort was spent on the aerodynamics and handling qualities of the aircraft, it really does just fly beautifully and it’s probably the nicest handling jet I’ve flown,” he adds.

Cole is quick to point out the Citation X is not just all about speed and handling characteristics, as it offers a princely ride for the company’s corporate and executive charter clientele too. Being in the midsize segment, the Citation X cabin is furnished with double-club seating for eight passengers, and has a belted seat immediately behind the forward galley, plus a belted lavatory seat. The passenger cabin is also a winner with passengers because it’s relatively large; a very generous 23ft 7in in length, while cabin height and width scale is 5ft 7in and 5ft 6in, respectively. Even when seated there is plenty of head and shoulder room, so occupants can freely swivel in their seats without body parts hitting cabin walls.

Cole says that on an average charter flight the jet will carry anywhere from four to six passengers, with a flight crew of two upfront. The Citation X also comes with a spacious lavatory at the rear, which is big enough to double up as a private dressing room for guests to change in before landing. It also provides plenty of luggage space with a heated, pressurised baggage compartment that can hold 700lbs of baggage.

“The cabin is large and well-equipped. It’s also very comfortable and



very quiet to travel in. It's got a good galley with a microwave oven, and hot and cold areas, and it's got a dual DVD Inflight entertainment system. So the passengers like it and really seem to appreciate their time flying in this aircraft. We also do a few tours in the Citation X because of its range and speed, and passengers are familiar with it. When we go on long trips, where they get on and off the aircraft a few times over a series of days or weeks, we can see the passengers are very comfortable in it. They make it like their own down the back," Cole points out.

Essendon Airport-based JetCity is one of Australia's big-hitting aircraft management/charter specialists, with the flying hardware to help it fulfil its professional corporate/executive charter and periodic medevac/organ retrieval flying responsibilities. The company's location in Victoria, Australia, provides it with good access to New Zealand, the lower Pacific, the Australian continent, plus Southeast Asia. Consequently, it has the right stuff to fly to those regions, plus further afield, should a corporate customer require a jet with long-range capability. The Citation X is just one jet — among a fleet that includes a Learjet 35, 45 and Gulfstream IV aircraft that can whisk passengers away on sectors approaching the 2,700nm-mark in short order, as Cole explains.

"It gives you greater speed and similar range capabilities to more expensive airplanes, which makes it a very efficient charter option. For the niche in which it sits, and that's for people who appreciate a sports car of an airplane, and for a very fast airplane it's a very efficient machine... we've done Perth — Melbourne in two hours 40 [minutes], so it's certainly a fast airplane; and Essendon to Fiji is four hours' flight time, so it's faster than airlines on those longer sectors. We've also done Brisbane to Melbourne in an hour and 45 [minutes], while we can do an Essendon — Auckland sector in two hours 40 [minutes], and that's generally the flight time from Essendon to anywhere in NZ, give or take, although we did fly Essendon to Queenstown once in about two hours and 15 minutes, so it's a very quick aircraft."

"We'll regularly cruise at Mach 0.90, so we're flying about 70-80 miles an hour faster than other airliners around the place...I've gone past Boeing 737s travelling in the same direction, and we flew past them at 100 miles an hour...The Citation X was designed with owner pilots in mind. It flies like you would expect a sports car to drive. If you don't want to fly it and you want to sit down the back in a big luxurious cabin, you don't care so much about the handling characteristics of the airplane because you're down the back. But if you own it, and you fly it, you want it to feel sweet, and this airplane has that sweet spot," the company CEO says.

From a systems perspective, the Citation X comes equipped with some little whiz-bang goodies that help it to fly fast and high. Besides the obvious and impressive highly efficient swept wing, the jet is also equipped with two fuel-efficient Rolls-Royce Allison AE3007C1 turbofan engines, each capable of pushing out 6,764lbs of thrust. Cole mentions that "as long as you've got 1,500 metres of runway you're good to go in this airplane", and on a standard day the



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Citation X is capable of getting airborne at an MTOW of 36,100lb. He adds that its "central nervous system" is provided by a very intuitive Honeywell Primus 2000 avionics suite, consisting of a combination of five Primary Flight Displays (PFD) and Multi-Function Displays (MFD). The crew is constantly in the loop regarding all matters pertaining to engine, cabin and aircraft systems performance, plus critical flight, traffic and navigational data. In short, the Citation X is as user-friendly as a pilot could ever hope for. However, while Cole is well-versed in and happy to recite the jet's technical systems, it's the sheer joy of flying it that puts a smile on his face.

"There's a difference between something that feels just right and something that's legal and can be certified," he says, "and the Citation X strikes just the right balance. It's exactly how you would describe an ideal airplane." →