

Morane-Saulnier Paris

The very first Very Light Jet

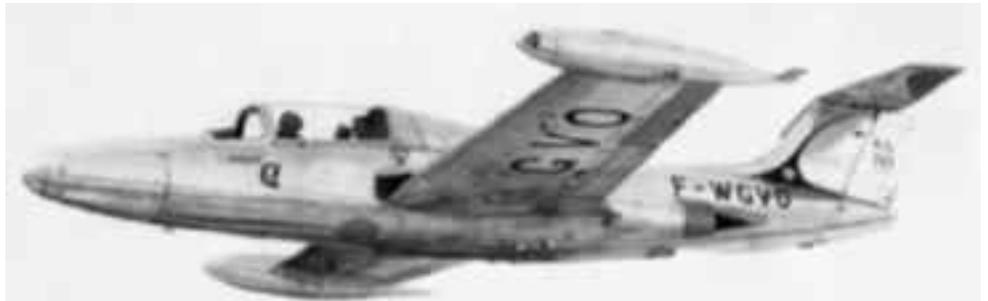


*Think the VLJ is a modern phenomenon? They've been around for almost 60 years, says **Mike Jerram***

Which was the first business jet? North American Sabreliner? Lockheed JetStar? Lear Jet 23? de Havilland DH.125?

None of those. It was the little M.S.760 Paris from French manufacturer Morane-Saulnier, a company founded in 1911 by the brothers Leon and Robert Morane and Raymond Saulnier and steeped in French aviation history.

The Paris started out as the M.S.755 Fleuret, a two-seat, side-by-side seating military jet trainer first flown in January 1953. It was Morane-Saulnier's bid for a French Government contract that was won by the V-tail, tandem-seating Fouga Magister, the first 100 of which, ironically, were manufactured by Morane-Saulnier as Fouga then lacked



Top: The prototype Paris, bearing the French capital's coat arms beneath the cockpit
Above: Twin Turboméca Marboré IIC engine installation is clearly seen here
Below: The prototype was crated, shipped to New York and reassembled at New Jersey's Teterboro Airport for an extensive U.S. marketing tour on behalf of Beech Aircraft





manufacturing capability.

The Fleuret was redesigned by Morane-Saulnier's chief engineer René Gauthier and his team as the four-seat M.S.760. The prototype, converted from the second Fleuret and initially called Fleuret II, first flew on 29 July 1954 in the hands of test pilot Jean Cliquet. Initial flight-testing confirmed that none of the Fleuret's excellent handling qualities had been lost. To demonstrate its potential, Raymond Saulnier suggested that the then newly-appointed French Air Minister, Diomède Catroux, should fly in it to NATO exercises at Bitburg, Germany. On the morning of the flight the Fleuret II was informally dubbed 'Paris' when a sticker bearing the French capital's coat of arms was stuck beneath its cabin. Like the sticker, the name

Above: Prototype F-BGVO pictured over New York's Bronx-Whitestone Bridge
Right: The Paris briefly headed Beechcraft's range, shown here with Bonanza, Twin Bonanza and Super 18 in a contemporary advertisement

Below: Morane-Saulnier test pilot Jean Cliquet (with headset) flew more than 2,100 passengers during the Paris's U.S. demonstration tour, including an evidently delighted Eva Gabor

stuck. Next day, Jean Cliquet took the Paris on a return trip to Algiers to mark the 41st anniversary of pioneer French aviator Roland Garros's first ever aerial crossing of the Mediterranean.

Powered by two 880 lb st Turboméca



Marboré IIC turbojets, the Paris had a four-seat, 2+2 cabin with rearward sliding canopy, pressurised to maintain an 11,800-foot environment to its maximum operating ceiling of 23,000 feet. No other production business aircraft offered pressurisation at that time. It had a maximum speed of 355 mph, and range sufficient to fly New York-Chicago, St. Louis-Washington D.C. or Seattle-San Francisco nonstop. The Marboré engine would later become better known as the Continental J69-T-9 that powered the Cessna T-37 'Tweet' two-seat military trainer, of which Cessna planned a four-seat version, the Model 407, that might have rivalled the Paris in the marketplace, but got no further than a full-scale mockup.

Among those attracted by the Paris was Beech Aircraft Corporation, which took on North American marketing and manufacturing rights, believing that U.S. business aircraft operators would seize the chance to fly a jet. "With this modern jet, executive flying is released from traditional patterns. The past is left far behind. New horizons open. Nowhere in the world is there another airplane of its type... an amazingly fast, four-seat airplane, something that has never been offered before," crowed a 1955 publicity puff. And it was true.

That year, hosted by Teterboro, New Jersey-

based Beechcraft distributor Atlantic Aviation, the prototype Paris was shipped to New York, reassembled and taken on a 40-city, four-and-a-half-month demonstration tour, during which Jean Cliquet conducted 851 flights and logged 443 flight hours with not a single flight cancelled for unscheduled maintenance.

The Paris covered the USA from New York City in the east to Oakland in the west, Minneapolis in the north to San Antonio in the south, and also demonstrated at Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto in Canada. Among the first of 2,126 passengers carried were Beechcraft President Olive Anne Beech, singer Frank Sinatra and actress Eva Gabor. The Paris was also flown by many corporate pilots and business aircraft operators, including the Rockefellers' personal pilot Najeeb 'Jeeb' Hallaby, later to become Federal Aviation Agency Administrator, and famous U.S. radio and TV personality Arthur Godfrey.

All who flew in the Paris were reportedly impressed. FAA certification was achieved in July 1958, and Beech geared up for an initial production batch of 50 aircraft. In the event, very few of those potential

buyers who had flown in the aircraft had been impressed enough to put their money down. Beech sold just two (one of them to Henry and Louise Timken of Timken Roller Bearing, who were later to become launch

customers for the Lear Jet 23 and Aero Jet Commander), and abandoned plans for mass production.

The Paris enjoyed greater sales success elsewhere. Buyers included the Shah of Iran, Venezuelan billionaire Napoléon Dupuoy, Morocco's future king Prince Moulay El Hassan, Harold Quandt, heir to the German BMW car empire, and Enrico Mattei, chief executive of the Italian national oil company AGIP. Mattei, along with his pilot and an American journalist, died in the Paris when it crashed in Lombardy during a storm. It was later alleged that there had been a bomb aboard. Britain's College of Aeronautics took delivery of a Paris in 1959, and flew it from Cranfield on various research tasks for more



Above and Left: Beech Aircraft conducted an extensive demonstration and advertising campaign for the Paris, but the business aircraft market was not yet ready for a jet, and only two were sold in the U.S.

than a quarter of a century.

The bulk of the 157 Parises built went to the military — 36 to France's l'Armée de l'Air, 14 to l'Aéronavalé, 48 to Argentina, of which 36 were manufactured locally under licence, and 24 to Brazil. The uprated 1,058 lb st Marboré VI turbojet was introduced on the 1960 M.S.760B Paris II, many earlier aircraft being retrofitted with the more powerful engines. A stretched Paris III model was developed by Morane Saulnier's then newly appointed chief designer Joseph Rostaing. It had a six-seat cabin with

'porthole' windows, a conventional door replacing the sliding canopy, uprated pressurisation, integral fuel tanks which dispensed with the Paris's trademark tiptanks, and many systems improvements. The Paris III made its public debut at the 1964 Salon at Le Bourget, but never went into production, and manufacture of the four-seater ended that year too.

But the Paris is not yet dead. Georgia-based MS760 Sales Corporation has acquired the Type Certificate and assembled a large stock of mostly ex-military airframes that it plans to refurbish, re-engine with modern Pratt & Whitney or Williams turbofans, equip with 'glass' cockpits, and sell for around \$450,000 each.

And the company Raymond Saulnier and the Morane brothers founded nearly a century ago? It was absorbed by Socata in 1966, and is now DAHER-Socata, part of the EADS consortium and manufacturer of the jet-quick TBM 850 single-engined turboprop. *With thanks to DAHER-Socata's Philippe de Segovia for his assistance with this article.* ■



Above right: The much-revised, six-seat 'cabin class' Paris III appeared in 1964, but never went into production This photo: A French-registered Paris II makes a low-level pass at Duxford during the 1984 Christie's sale

