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# Business Airport

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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## Sound advice

How are general aviation airports winning the battle against aircraft noise?



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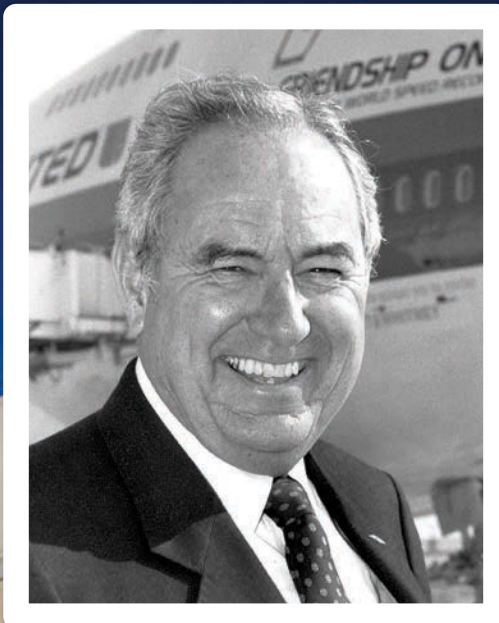
**California:** Three airports talk noise abatement and how to stay in business

HUMANITARIAN AID ♦ AIRCRAFT REGISTRATION ♦  
CLAY LACY INTERVIEW ♦ FUEL PARTNERSHIPS ♦ VIRTUAL FBOs

# *Record breaker*



Clay Lacy Aviation recently welcomed the all-new Gulfstream G650 to its diverse global charter fleet of 50 business jets, pictured here with the Learjet 24 in the background



# CLAY LACY JETS

With a career spanning over 60 years and 29 world speed records under his belt, Clay Lacy is one of the world's most experienced aviation entrepreneurs. *Business Airport International* spoke with the veteran about his illustrious career and what the future holds

Words | Hazel King





Being born in Wichita, Kansas – often described as the ‘air capital of the world’ – may have had something to do with Clay Lacy’s success in the aviation industry. In 1937, at the age of five, his mother took him to the local airfield to watch the airplanes take off and land. “After my first airplane ride when I was seven, I decided I wanted to be in aviation,” Lacy explains. “I started flying when I was 12, and have been lucky enough to experience many types of aviation, from general and corporate aviation to working at United Airlines, conducting test flights, producing air-to-air photography and cinematography, as well as air racing.”

Lacy has more than six decades of experience in the field and began teaching others to fly at just 16. “I had a great time as a flight instructor; at that age everything comes easy. It helped me to build up a lot of flying time, although it didn’t help my grades at school because I was thinking more about flying than about my school work.”

By the time he was 19, he had built up more than 1,500 flight hours and in January 1952, he joined United Airlines as a co-pilot on the



Above left: **Lacy, a new Air Force lieutenant, dresses in full flight gear prior to a sortie in 1955**



Above right: **Lacy smiles in the cockpit of his signature purple P-51 race airplane circa 1968**

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Douglas DC-3 aircraft. He remained with the company for 41 years, during which time he also joined the Air National Guard, flying the F-86 Sabre jet and becoming the officer in charge of instrument training.

But it was in 1955, when he met Allen Paulson, owner of the California Airmotive Corporation, that Lacy became involved in corporate aviation. “I started working with Allen and we got into selling airplanes such as Martin 404s to corporate companies.”

In the late 1950s, Lacy also became close friends with William (Bill) Lear, creator of the Learjet, helping him secure US\$40,000 worth of deposits to take back to Switzerland where the aircraft were manufactured. “Two years later Bill called me and asked me to come to Wichita and see what he was doing, so I went back and it was a really interesting program,” Lacy explains. “Bill had planned to have factory direct sales but he was running out of money, so he thought that if he set up a distributor program and had five distributors, with each one ordering five aircraft for US\$50,000 a piece deposit, he could get US\$1.25m to help him.

“Allen became one of those distributors and I managed Learjet sales for his company in the 11 western states in the USA in 1964. I was the first person to bring a Learjet into Van Nuys Airport that October. It was a very exciting time for me – I was taking many Hollywood stars for a ride in the Learjet and even sold one to Frank Sinatra.”

#### Movie work

The Learjet wasn’t Lacy’s only link to Hollywood – in the 1970s he began working as an air-to-air photographer and cinematographer, producing scenes for legendary films including *Top Gun*, *Flight of the Intruder* and *The Great Santini*. Using revolutionary Astrovision-equipped aircraft, Lacy has filmed more than 2,800 projects for the military, general aviation, airlines, television and feature films worldwide, and has been recognized by both the Screen Actors Guild and the Directors Guild of America for his achievements and contributions to aerial cinematography. “I have shot almost every airline in the world and have traveled extensively – I went to Europe to shoot airlines, flew to the Philippines for a movie and traveled to Japan to shoot an advert.”



**Lacy in a Learjet cockpit in 2009**



## Top tips for FBOs

- Provide a quick service – usually people on a jet are just landing for fuel, so they want to refuel and take off again as quickly as possible
- Ensure customer service is faultless – courteous employees are key to a successful business and happy customers
- Offer ramp access – there must be adequate space to park and easy access for passengers and crew

Founded in 1968, Clay Lacy Aviation is distinguished as one of the most experienced operators of private jets in the world, as demonstrated by this bird's-eye view of the ramp at its headquarters in Los Angeles

### Charter business

In 1968, Lacy decided to set up his own charter business – the first in western USA. “That same year, Bill had sold the Learjet factory to the Gates Rubber Company so we lost the distributorship. I loved the little airplane and wanted to stay involved with it so I leased one and started my own charter company. After a year I bought my first Learjet, and by 1972 I had three of them and was doing quite well in the charter business,” explains Lacy.

Following continued success, Lacy built his own FBO, Clay Lacy Aviation, at Van Nuys Airport in 1981, and has since grown the business to offer aircraft management, maintenance, avionics, interior completions, sales and acquisition services. “At that time, Van Nuys didn’t have anyone providing services to corporate aviation, and I felt that it needed it. We fly more than any other company at Van Nuys and we manage more than 60 airplanes, chartering about 45 – most of these are other people’s airplanes, we only own about five,” he says.

Lacy believes the biggest challenge in providing charter services is making sure you always have business. “I was lucky in that, as I had been Learjet’s sales manager, I had had many people in California on a Learjet demonstration flight. They came to use us for charter services, so in the very first month we were in the black. We



Above (L-R): **Lacy, actor Danny Kaye and inventor Bill Lear pose next to the Lear 23 called UNICEF One in 1965, prior to making a flight for charity**

Right: **Lacy inspects the Astrovision camera system in 1975**



flew 50 hours in the first month on one airplane. So we’ve always had a pretty good business. The challenge is to make sure you provide the best service you can give – the aviation, FBO and charter business is all about service, so you try to be better than your competition.”

### Speed records

In addition to becoming the first charter company in western USA, Lacy has also achieved a number of speed records over the course of his career. Between 1964 and 1972, he flew his P-51 Mustang in every unlimited class air race in the USA, and in 1970 became the national air race champion. The following year he placed first in a race from Milwaukee to St Louis and in the St



Above: Neil Armstrong with Lacy

Louis Fighter Pilot Air Tournament, and he also won first place in The Great Race from London, UK, to Victoria, British Columbia, flying a Learjet. But perhaps his most notable achievement is setting the around-the-world speed record in 1988. "That is one of my career highlights. We had Neil Armstrong on board as a guest of honor, and we raised US\$530,000, which we gave to a children's charity. I still look back on that journey as one of the really fun trips – we flew it in 36 hours and 54 minutes going eastbound, so we went through three nights, three days, two sunsets and three sunrises."

Lacy was also one of the first aircraft owners to equip his Gulfstream jets with Blended Winglet technology, and in June 1995, he and Joe Clark, founder of Aviation Partners Inc, set world speed records in a Gulfstream IISP featuring this technology during a flight from Los Angeles to Paris. The flight culminated with the jet being displayed at the Paris Air Show. On the way home they also established a world speed record from Moscow to Los Angeles.

### Promoting the industry

With such a long history in the corporate aviation industry, Lacy is keen to promote the importance of business jets to the wider economy. "Some people think that those who use corporate jets are very wealthy and only fly to exotic locations for vacation, but that isn't true. Most of the flights on corporate jets are business trips where a lot of people are going to benefit both directly and indirectly. Thousands of people are employed in the corporate jet industry. Money is not being wasted; it is being spent to provide jobs. Corporate aviation generates over US\$19bn a year for the US economy, and Van Nuys Airport alone employs 12,000 people – the airport is the biggest single producer of jobs in the San Fernando Valley. Right now, if you eliminated all corporate jets, business in the region would probably reduce by half. All big companies need corporate airplanes to stay competitive."

### Bright future

At the age of 81, Lacy is far from ready to retire from aviation. "I'm still flying and doing most of the things I have always done. The next thing for me is to continue helping the company president Brian Kirkdoffer keep Clay Lacy Aviation going



### Picking a favorite

With more than 50,000 flight hours under his belt, Clay Lacy has flown more than 300 aircraft types. But what is his favorite aircraft to fly? "It depends on what kind of job you're trying to do – if you're just going with a couple of people and it's within its range, I think the Learjet is the greatest little airplane going – it is reliable and fast and provides good transportation. On the airline, I loved the 727 and I really loved the 747. I like almost all airplanes, and I've seldom flown an airplane I didn't love."

Above: In 1988, a smiling Lacy prepares for take-off on a record-setting flight in a United Airlines Boeing 747SP called Friendship One

"The challenge is to make sure you provide the best service you can – the aviation, FBO and charter business is all about service, so you try to be better than your competition"

strong and to encourage young people into the industry. I've got several scholarships to help the younger generation get into aviation and learn to fly. In June 2014, I gave two airplanes away to a maintenance school in Van Nuys – a GIIISP and a Learjet – so that they would have modern airplanes to work on. I want to do what I can to help get young people involved in aviation.

"Aviation is a great field to be in and I think that most people in aviation are happy and like their work better than those in most professions. What's the best advice I can give people wanting to get into the industry? If you're passionate about it, and you really love it, you'll find a way to get into it and work at it. There are many facets of corporate aviation – mechanical, pilots, manufacturing – so no matter what you want to get into, it's up to you to find a way and work hard to get where you want to be." ✈

