



Head in the clouds, feet firmly on the ground

Interview with **Edward Queffelec**
CEO of SPARFELL Group

SPARFELL, one of the world leaders in business aviation, is a committed airline. A pioneer in the art of making travellers feel at home in the sky, the family group also adapts to challenges on the ground. By drawing on the synergies between its air and ground activities, developing eco-responsible initiatives and taking a stand for a more virtuous European sky, SPARFELL, a showcase for a privileged airline sector, keeps its feet firmly on the ground while continuing to soar gracefully above the clouds.

Can you remind us what SPARFELL does and tell us a little about its core business?

Our activities involve buying and selling airliners, private jets and helicopters, as well as providing all forms of chartering and management services for these aircraft. We currently manage a fleet of more than forty planes, of all types. Our core business is meeting specific, bespoke air travel requirements. For just over a year now, we've also been developing our SPARFELL Lifestyle Management business, a branch of our company dedicated to premium travel. Our goal is to become a single point of contact for our leisure clients on all organisational aspects of their trips. SPARFELL Lifestyle Management combines the services of a custom aviation company, a travel agency, a real estate agency, a shipowner and an extremely efficient concierge service. Whether you want

to charter a boat for the summer, find an exceptional place away from it all, or rent a chalet right next to the ski slopes, we take care of everything.

The health crisis had a significant impact on your sector. Now in 2023 with the crisis behind us, how is the business aviation market doing at present?

Of course, 2020 and 2021 were disastrous years due to COVID and the fact that travel was, basically, impossible. In 2022 there was a reopening effect, and even a form of decompensation after the health crisis, with many companies and individuals wanting and needing to travel once global activity picked up again. However, many commercial airlines had not reopened all their routes and most of the world's airport infrastructure was satu-



rated. It is because of – or thanks to – this context that many companies and individuals turned to business aviation to meet their travel needs. As a result, 2022 was a record year for our business, with an exceptionally steep growth curve. In short, we had a lot of new customers knocking at the door, but the big question was: will they stay once the skies fully reopened? Today, one year on, some of our customers have indeed gone back to commercial aviation, but many of them, particularly corporate customers, have remained loyal to us having realised that they can save money with private aviation.

So in certain cases, using business aviation is less expensive?

That's right. After using our services for the past year, lots of companies have come to realise the many advantages of business aviation: no stopovers, shorter flight times, guaranteed confidentiality on board so you can work during the journey and, in general, far fewer constraints than with conventional aviation. If you calculate, in terms of hourly pay, the amount of time wasted by a CEO or executive of a large multinational on traditional, sometimes long and complex connections, it quickly adds up. With the development of teleworking and the widespread use of tools like Zoom or Teams, we could have feared that many business passengers would give up travelling altogether. However many of them continue to travel: for those at the top of the company ladder, there's a real need to get out into the field in order to make certain decisions or launch certain projects. This makes travel an almost strategic necessity for many companies.

Given this trend, how is SPARFELL's business developing? What were the key issues for you this year?

I would say that 2023 has been a year of synergies for us. It's a trend that began to emerge in 2022, but which has since been significantly reinforced. Firstly, geographic synergy. We are expanding our network to broaden our range of operations, all combined with higher-performance aircraft that fly faster and longer. This allows us to increase the number of links between several destinations. All this in response to the growing needs of our customers throughout Europe, to whom we now offer a much wider range of destinations that they can reach directly. The other synergy that drives SPARFELL is that which exists between our different businesses, with the strengthening of our 'Lifestyle' activities and our entire branch dedicated to the organisation of bespoke trips. Increasingly, we are pooling all our skills and resources to offer our leisure customers a single point of contact for their premium trips or holidays. We recently started



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offering our services to organise special trips for major events such as the Paris Olympic Games in 2024. It's a real challenge that requires organisational proficiency, given how difficult it is to find a ticket for a competition, or accommodation during these events. All this combined with private plane journeys that avoid all the constraints inherent in other means of transport which, moreover, are often overcrowded during these busy periods.

Like many "polluting" industries, business aviation is facing real challenges in terms of the environment, and sometimes even downright mistrust. What is your analysis and position on the subject?

I think that a lot of factors need to be explained. To be sure, lots of people level their criticism against us, as if we had never been concerned about this reality. First of all, I would like to remind you that, since 2010, we have had to report all our carbon emissions wherever we fly in the world, and since 2014 we have had to pay for these CO₂ emissions in Europe. Last year, we paid out almost a million euros in carbon offsets for our aircraft. These amounts are far from negligible... We are aware that the pollution for which we are criticised comes from fuel consumption, and we are putting in place a whole series of measures to reduce it. It's also worth bearing in mind that each new generation of aircraft consumes roughly 15% less fuel than the previous one. This means that, in the past 50 years, fuel consumption per passenger has been halved! We didn't wait to react;



Philip G. Queffelec – Madagascar – Fly for Water



Nouveau G500 en flotte



Noemie Rosenthal – Madagascar – Fly for Water

I would even go so far as to say that business aviation is a pioneer on these issues. A very concrete example: today, at the wingtips of all airliners you can see what are known as “winglets”, a sort of small vertical wing that reduces the drag of the wing without lengthening it, leading to fuel savings of 2 to 3%. This technical device was tested for many years on business jets before being fitted on airliners.

What is SPARFELL doing specifically to meet these eco-responsible challenges?

We are building on the advances made by the aviation industry in terms of SAF, or Sustainable Aviation Fuel, derived from the hydrotreatment of waste oils and residues (used cooking oils, animal fats). Today, all the aircraft in our fleet can carry a mix of 50% kerosene and 50% SAF. But not all airports have facilities for refuelling with SAF, so we have set up our own book and claim system to compensate. In practical terms, if a businessperson takes off from Geneva where there is no SAF refuelling system, we offer to put this sustainable fuel in another aircraft departing from Paris where the system is available. Consequently, that person's carbon emissions are offset by another plane. We are also actively lobbying the European authorities for more sup-

port to produce sustainable fuels in Europe, as well as for the modernisation of air traffic management infrastructure and procedures, mainly for reasons of fuel economy. Let's consider cars and what is known as eco-driving: if you see a red light coming up 500 metres ahead, you will naturally anticipate it and ease off the accelerator, thereby consuming less fuel in anticipation of your stop. At present, we only have a very limited view of how to anticipate and optimise our routes, because our tools and procedures do not optimise fuel use sufficiently, forcing aircraft to take certain routes or fly at certain altitudes. However, with the implementation and development of best practices in the European airspace, it is estimated that savings on fuel and CO2 emissions could be as high as 14% by 2050. So we regularly draw legislators' attention to the urgency of these issues, which I think is far more virtuous than simply further taxing plane tickets.

You are also committed to charity and humanitarian work. Very recently you were involved in a programme to help people in need gain access to drinking water. Can you tell us a little more about this programme?

Yes. We set up our foundation, Fly4Water, to provide access to drinking water in remote areas and

for communities in need. Through the foundation, we offer our customers the opportunity to make a financial contribution to the distribution and development of filters that can instantly transform unsafe water into drinking water. A donation that our customers can make directly to our charity, or by adding the cost of one or more filters to their flight quote. The underlying idea is to give them the chance to support an initiative that has a direct impact on the problem of access to drinking water faced by certain populations. It's a promise that we also keep by donating filters to the foundation for every customer flight. We chose to set up this programme in Madagascar, a country where my family has lived and forged strong ties. We are very proud to be able to tell our customers that, by flying with us, they are helping to resolve a problem as vital as access to drinking water. It's a great way to keep your feet on the ground, even when you're sitting comfortably above the clouds. ■