



## Airborne limo: Lighter jets at lighter cost

**By Donna Goodison**

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Linear Air, an air taxi and charter service operating from Hanscom Field in Bedford, has started selling flights on the newest class of aircraft to hit the market - an Eclipse 500 very light jet that CEO William Herp believes could “democratize” private air transportation.

The \$1.7 million Eclipse, which seats three to four passengers and two pilots, has the capability of carrying Linear’s customers farther and faster than its existing fleet of eight-seat, single-engine turboprop Cessna Caravans.

Linear is the first Northeast company and third in the nation to have Federal Aviation Administration authorization to operate the Eclipse. The 6,000-lb. twin-engine jet has a 37.9-foot wingspan, 500-mile range and cruising speed of about 350 miles per hour, almost twice that of the Caravans.

Herp expects corporate business travelers to be the primary Eclipse customers. “The breakthrough technology is these small jet engines, which are able to deliver radically improved economics,” he said. “It’s an opportunity to take air transportation to a wider audience not previously able to justify the expense.”

But that wider audience still would encompass a very narrow base of deep-pocketed clients, industry analyst Robert Mann said.

“It clearly makes it more available to people who can’t afford to operate their own airplane or justify the purchase of a fractional share or jet card for 100 hours on a much larger jet,” he said. “The difficult part of the story is it’s a million-dollar limousine, so the market size is substantially smaller than the market for your standard \$25,000 Town Car. You’re talking folks whose value of time is in the nosebleed high area.”

The cost of travel on an Eclipse is half that of the preceding class of light jets, according to Herp, with a 300-mile day trip running about \$3,500 for three people. That price begins to approach the business-class fares of commercial airlines, he said. The advantage is passengers can set the schedule, and the Eclipse can take them faster to smaller airports not well-served by the airlines.

Linear expects to put a second Eclipse into service by year's end. Herp's goal is to have 10 running by the end of 2008 from Hanscom, New York and Washington, D.C.