

MLWAir

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Size matters

Mark Cuban's charter adds first-class 767-200

Dallas Business Journal - by [Margaret Allen](#) Staff Writer



Bud Force

A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN: Martin Woodall, CEO of MLWAir, is dwarfed by the charter airline's two large Boeing jets based at Dallas Love Field. The planes fill a unique niche in the charter aircraft market.

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A luxury charter airline owned by **Dallas Mavericks'** owner Mark Cuban and two of his partners appears to have the world's only **Boeing 767-200** charter jet with all-first-class seats, according to the company and industry sources.

The 767, based at **Dallas Love Field**, is the second large jet for Dallas-based **MLWAir LLC**, which also owns a Boeing 757-200. That plane, which went into service in 2001, offers limited charters, but is primarily dedicated to escorting the NBA's Dallas Mavericks.

Both planes were completely refurbished to offer luxurious, first-class seating and service. The planes are operated and maintained by the well-known charter company **Pace Airlines**, which is based in Winston-Salem, N.C. Pace has 35 employees at Love Field dedicated to MLWAir.

MLWAir's two aircraft, the newest of which went into service late last year, fill a charter market niche for which there's demand, but very little capacity, says Paul McCluskey, director of commercial operations for **Sentient Flight Group LLC**.

The so-called "on-demand" charter market records annual sales of \$12.7 billion, according to David Almy, spokesman for the Virginia-based **National Air Transportation Association**.



MLWAir's 767 is undoubtedly the largest permanently configured aircraft available for public charter with all-first-class seats and the same safety standards required of scheduled airlines, McCluskey said.

There are other luxurious aircraft in the skies, but they aren't available to the public, he said.

"There certainly is demand for this type," McCluskey said, noting the wide seats, expansive roominess and adjustable head and foot rests. "I have clients who request that sort of aircraft every day. ... MLW is building that niche through having a high quality of aircraft that's modern, and they have not skimped on money to refit it."

The 757 is equally unique, he said.

"It's probably one of the most comfortable first-class cabins of anything available. Every person has better-than-a-domestic first class seat," McCluskey said, noting the airplane's stand-up wet bar, private office and card tables.

The low-profile Martin Woodall is an operational guru for the high-flying Cuban empire, which is comprised of some 40 companies. As MLWAir CEO, Woodall leads MLWAir, which takes its name from his initials. While the 757 was seeing increasing use as a charter jet, with two jets now in service, the six-year-old airline should reach \$18 million revenue in 2008, up from \$12 million in 2007, Woodall said.

MLWAir, which is owned by Cuban, Woodall and Robert Hart, chief counsel for the Mark Cuban Cos., brought on the second Boeing aircraft, which seats 100, after seeing pent-up demand for MLWAir's 63-seat Boeing 757.

The 757 flew 160 hours a year for the Mavericks the first year it began operating in 2001. As a charter now available to others, including competing NBA teams, it flew 800 hours in 2007. That was despite the fact its availability is limited to the **National Basketball Association's** off-season, or when the Mavericks are playing at home.

A 767-200 normally seats from 180 to 245 passengers when configured for a commercial airline, with coach seats in a 2-3-2 arrangement across the main cabin.

Almy confirmed the aircraft in the 100-seat configuration is unique. Of 2,300 charter companies registered with the **Federal Aviation Administration**, Almy said "They've identified a market, and the market's identified them, and that's a happy marriage," Almy said. "It looks like it's going to be a success."

U.S.-based charter bookings are strong, growing about 5% to 6% annually, Almy said. The nation's economic slowdown, however, has caused a bit of a decline since November, he said. Customers still see a savings of personal productivity, particularly when flying to and from small markets at nonhub airports, where scheduled airline flights are limited.

"The economies of scale tend to favor larger operators," Almy said. "Regulatory demands are high, and the market is in search of national brands. ... It's a consumer comfort level."



Top-of-class amenities

MLWAir purchased its 767 for \$11 million from Miami-based **AeroTurbine Inc.** Previously it flew scheduled commercial passenger service for the now-defunct Ansett Australia.

MLWAir invested \$6 million to refurbish it top to bottom -- in the Mavericks colors of blue and gray -- with state-of-the-art avionics; large, ergonomic, custom-made seats by California-based **Regent Aerospace Corp.**; and, new interiors from Washington-based Heath Tecna with its NuLook 767 cabin retrofit kit that includes white lighting considered more pleasant and relaxing. The 767 jet's all-first-class, leather-upholstered seats are configured 2-2-2 across the cabin.

In flight, passengers have special under-seat cubbies, water-bottle holders, dual tray tables and individual iPods loaded with movies. A crew of nine pilots and 16 flight attendants staff the two planes.

The 767 charters for \$12,000 an hour for U.S. flights, and \$14,000 an hour for international travel.

MLWAir's airliners are attractive for large parties, because they're more economical than two or more corporate jets.

"My price per seat is a lot less than the corporate aircraft price per seat, and I'm giving you a lot more," Woodall said.

Almy, with the National Air Transportation Association, agreed.

"At a certain passenger count, they are correct," he said. "There are economies of scale that kick in. You put 100 people on that plane and it's probably pretty economical."

The band Black Eyed Peas recently completed a \$1 million charter in the plane for the group's world tour, hitting 13 countries in 21 days, Woodall said.

MLWAir's client roster ranges from entertainers, movie studio and television crews, dozens of professional sports teams, governments, the White House press corps, tour operators and Fortune 500 companies.

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