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BARRON'S PENTA

The Finest Five

Our favorite business jets, from entry level to top of the line

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By [MARK HUBER](#)
September 27, 2014

What are the best jets on the market for busy folks with places to go? Not that easy to answer. A plethora of business-jet makes and models crowd an ever-more bifurcated market. To simplify things, we reviewed the latest jet models in five categories—long range, super-midsize, midsize, light, and entry level—and picked Penta's Finest Five. We consider these jets best in their class when it comes to cabin space, passenger amenities, performance, and value for money. We've also identified each category's runner-up. Note that all miles cited are regular miles, not nautical miles.

Long Range, Large Cabin: Gulfstream G650

Price: \$64.5 million **Passengers:** 11-17 **Top speed:** 610 mph
Range: 8,050 miles **Runner-up:** Bombardier Global 6000

Near-supersonic speed, globe-girdling range, and a big cabin have created a flagship hit for Gulfstream and its parent, General Dynamics. Still the world standard when it comes to ramp envy, Gulfstream began making deliveries of its faster and better G650 in 2012, and the current order book still stretches to 2017. More than 60 G650s were delivered through May 2014.



The Gulfstream G650 has near-supersonic speed, globe-girdling range, and a big cabin. *Photo: Courtesy of Gulfstream*

There's so much to like about this airplane: the uncluttered interior lines suggestive of Art Deco; the choice of 12 basic but thoughtful floor plans; the oversize passenger windows; the 80-inch "man-size" couch; the smooth, wired, and large executive seats; and a Wi-Fi system that allows you to control virtually everything in the cabin, including selecting movies, music, food, and drinks, with your smartphone. Competitors are years away from fielding a credible alternative.

If you want to cut the delivery time and snap up a gently used G650, or assume an existing delivery position nearer the front of the line, be prepared to pay up to a \$7 million premium atop the official "new" price of \$64.5 million. An extended-range

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version, the G650ER, will be available for \$2 million more beginning in 2015 and will fly up to 8,625 miles nonstop.

Super-Midsize: Dassault Falcon 2000s

Price: \$27.7 million **Passengers:** 10 **Top speed:** 540 mph
Range: 3,852 miles **Runner-up:** Gulfstream G280

While the Falcon 2000 fuselage has been around since 1996, the plane has undergone a number of permutations over the years, even though the basic formula remains the same: a spacious flat-floor cabin—almost eight feet wide—in a jet that is lightweight, offers good fuel economy, and provides great handling worthy of its fighter-jet pedigree.

Last year, France's Dassault began delivering the 2000S, a lightened version of the airplane that combines all of these attributes with the new ability to use short runways and make steep approaches, all thanks to redesigned wing control surfaces. The 2000S also features tweaked Pratt & Whitney Canada engines that are cleaner, more powerful, and efficient—Dassault claims they help the 2000S burn 10% less fuel than aircraft that are 20% smaller. But the best part of this airplane is the restyled cabin, developed in collaboration with BMW Designworks USA, with resculpted passenger seats that are noticeably more comfortable. Hip fabric/color combinations are now on offer, as are all of the latest passenger electronics in HD. Like a great French wine, this airplane just gets better with age.

Midsize: Cessna Citation Sovereign+

Price: \$18.13 million **Passengers:** 8-9 **Top speed:** 529 mph
Range: 3,450 miles **Runner-up:** Gulfstream G150



The Cessna Citation Sovereign+ needs only a short runway *Photo: Courtesy of Textron Aviation*

The Sovereign's genius is that it delivers short runway capabilities and good range in a proven package of solid, truck-like reliability. While some pilots complain that it also turns in the air like a truck, we think that's a minor knock. Mostly, there are no unpleasant surprises here, particularly for operators using the airplane like a corporate shuttle, loading up seats, and taking off. More than 350 first-generation Sovereigns have been put in service since 2004.

The "plus" version hit the market last year. This updated model of Cessna's classic "gray-flannel jet" features a restyled cabin with better seats and lighting; an improved environmental-control system that maintains the air circulation in the cabin; and new electronics with digital capacity that allows for an updated passenger-entertainment system. The retuned engines provide a bit more thrust, and the airplane has a slightly longer wingspan, allowing it to carry more fuel. It's not the flashiest offering in its category, but its versatile performance and stout construction earn it top marks. The latest improvements should keep the Sovereign bloodline flying for years to come.

Light: Nextant 400XTi

Price: \$5.15 million **Passengers:** 6-7 **Top speed:** 529 mph
Range: 2,303 miles **Runner-up:** Embraer Phenom 300



The 400XTi kills everything else in its category with better speed, cabin comfort, and operating economics, besides standard features normally found only on larger aircraft. That said, it's not a new airplane, per se. Nextant buys secondhand Beechjets, an out-of-

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The Nextant 400XTi kills everything in its category, with better speed, cabin comfort, and good value for the money. Photo: Courtesy of Nextant Aerospace

production jet once made by Beechcraft, and then radically re-engineers the aircraft. The firm replaces the paint and the interior, installs new electrical systems, and then bolts on a pair of dramatically more fuel-efficient and quieter Williams turbofan engines. You are in essence buying a new airplane after Nextant finishes its retrofit, complete with a new-airplane warranty, and the result is an aircraft that offers stellar performance and reliability.

The 400XTi's main strength is the cabin that comes with standard features the competition doesn't offer: a flat floor as opposed to the annoying trenched center aisle; a three-place couch perfect for naps and stretching out; generous legroom in the executive corner of facing single seats; an enlarged lavatory; and more room for carry-ons and the latest electronics. A redesigned cabin shell yields more shoulder room and headroom, and new insulation dampens interior-cabin noise to levels found in a luxury automobile. It's also half the price of most new offerings by rivals. What's not to like?

Entry Level: Embraer Phenom 100E

Price: \$4.161 million **Passengers:** 4-6 **Top speed:** 448 mph
Range: 1,355 miles **Runner-up:** Cessna Citation Mustang

The airplane's speed, good short-runway performance, and fuel economy are even better than some turboprops. The slick cabin that Embraer developed was, as with the pricier Dassault Falcon, crafted in collaboration with BMW Designworks USA. But here's the one thing to remember about this airplane: It's the only one in its class that comes with a lavatory and privacy door. That's major when you've had one too many cups of morning joe at 41,000 feet. The Phenom 100 alone lets you maintain your dignity.

The E is the second-generation Phenom 100, and it incorporates numerous improvements, including wing spoilers, which are control surfaces atop the wings that pop up to provide aerodynamic braking. That means surefooted runway stops and steeper descents. There's also attractive new cabinetry, the choice of 11 new color/fabric schemes, and more-comfortable seats. But the most important seat on this plane is in the back, behind a door.

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