

# Hate Heathrow? It may be time you 'bought' yourself a private jet...

Fractional ownership schemes mean that a plane of one's own is no longer a vice for just the rich, says **Maggie O'Sullivan**

**T**he Duchess of Cornwall was reviled last week for taking a private jet to Greece, adding 45,000 kg to her carbon footprint. Prince Charles put his carbon foot in it earlier this year, too, when he flew to New York to collect an environmental award – by private jet.

So why, despite the criticism it invites and the damage it apparently does to the environment, are the royals so wedded to their private jets?

Well, as I discovered when I flew on a private jet for the first time last weekend, do it once and it's almost impossible not to want to do it again.

I flew to St Tropez from a tiny airfield just north of Woking, in Surrey. It took 45 minutes to reach the airfield from my home in South London, followed by half an hour's wait in the wonderfully archaic Hangar Café, and, oh, five minutes to board – which included having my passport ticked off a list by a man with a clipboard and a discussion with the pilot about weather conditions over the English Channel.

Two-and-a-half hours – and yes, several glasses of Champagne plus lunch – later, we landed in La Mole, an equally tiny airfield just outside St Tropez. Twenty minutes after that, I was

checking into my hotel. Including transfer times, check-in and security, it would have taken closer to six hours to do the same journey by scheduled flight to Nice, not to mention the discomfort of flying in and out of Heathrow.

Another reason the Duchess was so roundly criticised, I suspect, is because private air travel is still seen as something only the extremely wealthy can afford to do. In fact, this simply isn't the case any more. Fractional ownership, which allows you to buy a certain number of flying hours a year, has brought private jet travel well within the reach of the ordinary

holidaymaker. My return flight (on a PC12 turboprop, which seats nine) worked out at £10,000 or £1,100 per person. To achieve that price, you have to take out a five-year fractional ownership contract which gives access to a minimum of 62.5 hours per year. But if you don't fly that often, you can always charter. You could do the same trip to St Tropez on an eight-seat Falcon 50, rented through London-based luxury travel provider Avolus (which is also Jetfly's sole agent in the UK), for example, for £22,000 or £2,750 per person if you take seven friends.

I'm afraid there's no dodging the

carbon footprint issue: a turboprop may produce substantially lower carbon emissions per person than a commercial jet, but my private flight was in addition to that scheduled one from Heathrow to Nice, not instead of it.

Still, I find myself sympathising with the beleaguered Duchess of Cornwall. If a Greek billionaire had invited me to use his private jet, I suspect that I, too, would have found it hard to resist.

■ *For details of fractional ownership with Jetfly or private plane, limousine or helicopter charter, contact Avolus (0845 450 1504; [www.avolus.com](http://www.avolus.com)).*