

PEAKS

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WHAT PRICE POWDER?

Unless you're Donald Trump, pursuing powder in a private jet is pure fantasy. Or is it?

BY DAVID O. WILLIAMS

IT'S FRIDAY MORNING IN NEW YORK CITY. Surfing the Web at work you notice a huge winter storm has Colorado in its crosshairs for later that evening, with up to two feet of fresh snow expected in Vail's Back Bowls by Saturday morning.

For a few thousand bucks you might be able to find a last-minute, first-class commercial flight into Denver International Airport that night. And if everything went just right, including the 100-mile drive on snowy roads, you just might find yourself floating in all that powder the next day.

But as long as you're dreaming, you might as well expand your fantasy to include a private jet into Eagle County Airport, just 30 minutes from the slopes. "You could see there's a storm coming that night, and if you wanted to be there to ski the next day, call us first thing that morning and fly out at 7 p.m.," says Randy Brandoff, vice president of marketing for Marquis Jet, a New York-based private jet company that offers fractional ownership. "You could do that no problem."

Ten hours of advance notice (longer during some holiday periods) is all that's required to book a private flight to your favorite Vail Resorts mountain for you and six buddies with Marquis Jet's 25-hour card program. Here's how it works: You pay a flat fee (\$115,900 for a seven passenger Cessna Citation)

for 25 hours of flight time (wheels up to wheels down, plus six minutes for each takeoff and landing). A fully catered luxury jet is then all yours for chasing powder or just getting the family to your mountain home with a minimum amount of hassles. If you do the math, that's roughly three roundtrip flights from New York to Vail at \$5,500 per trip per person.

Yes, that's steep. But when you factor in the time and hurdles of commercial travel, private jet service suddenly becomes a surprisingly attainable dream—one an increasing number of skiers are making a reality.

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"We've seen more and more people using that Marquis 25-hour card," says Paul Gordon, president of the Vail Valley Jet Center, the general aviation facility at the Eagle County Airport. "Overall, it's been fantastic. It's brought a whole lot more people into the general aviation industry that otherwise would not have been able to afford it. And after 2001, with

Luxury travel and your own powdery takeoff are a phone call away with fractional jet programs such as the one offered by Marquis Jet.

commercial aviation becoming more of a hassle, that's helped to grow the fractional industry as well."

Marquis launched in mid-2001 (pre 9/11) to fill a void in the fractional ownership industry. It draws from a 600-aircraft fleet supplied by NetJets, a private jet company that began offering fractional ownership in 1986 as an alternative to full private-jet ownership or charter services. NetJets, however, typically requires a 50-hour, five-year commitment, and most of its clients are corporations using the fleet for business travel. Marquis buys NetJets fractional blocks and sells them off in 25-hour slices, and 80 percent of its clients are individuals flying for personal use.

Gordon says fractional flying accounted for about 9 percent of the jet center's traffic in 1998 and that number has grown to about 28 percent over the past eight years.

That means there are a lot of people out there playing in your powder. Dare to dream big this winter, and you may just get there before they do. **PEAKS**

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