

20 Questions for:

CAPTAIN SAAD WALLAN IS WELL KNOWN IN THE MIDDLE EAST FOR BREAKING SALES RECORDS. HE NOT ONLY IMPORTS HYUNDAI CARS INTO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA, HE IS ALSO THE REGIONAL DISTRIBUTOR FOR CESSNA AIRCRAFT.



MEF: How long have you been flying?

SW: Since 1985 but it was only when I obtained a jet type rating that I took it seriously.

MEF: Where did you learn to fly?

SW: I had a great friend who instructed at Jackson Amelia Island, Leesburg, Florida so like many pilots before me, I learned there.

MEF: How many hours do you have?

SW: Just over 4500.

MEF: What types have you flown?

SW: Every Citation model apart from the X. I've also flown the Lear 35, Piper Cub, Cessna 172 and 421, Beechcraft Baron 58 and Bonanza. I've owned all of these too apart from a Piper Cub. I also have four of the new Cessna Skycatchers on order and these will be based at Thumamah Airport, 15 miles north of Riyadh's King Khaled Airport. They will be part of our new aviation club there – we already have a Part 145 service facility and a 14,000 foot runway.

MEF: What sparked your interest in flying?

SW: My foundation in the marketing and sales business in Saudi Arabia between 1970 and 1974 helped me realise that aircraft have wings and engines. I then bought a 1967-model Beechcraft Debonair in 1984 – it is still owned by a friend of mine in Florida. In 1989, I bought a Citation 501SP and hired a pilot. I flew with him in the right hand seat and realised I needed to be able to fly it too.

MEF: What has been your most memorable moment in flying so far?

SW: I have some very good memories and one in particular stands out when a friend asked me to crew his Citation XL back to Riyadh from Taif, a distance of about 450 miles, as his pilot was on vacation. We had a good laugh after he climbed

Wallan Aviation's Saad Wallan

aboard and saw me wearing my Arabic headdress – he teased me that I should remove it and then he wouldn't be worried about me flying the aircraft.

I also remember flying with an inexperienced pilot in a Citation 501 when we had a pressurisation failure at 41,000 feet. It was before I had a type rating and I had to take over and bring the aircraft down very quickly as he did not seem to understand the seriousness of the situation.

MEF: And what has been your biggest scare?

SW: I think when my children drive my Ferrari 355 and Porsche Cayenne. I have not had any big scares from aeroplanes – only cars.

MEF: What do you do for a living?

SW: I've been in business for 40 years having started selling used cars when I was 12 years old. I later started to import cars from the USA, mostly from General Motors and am now the Hyundai Agent in the Kingdom.

MEF: Where do you live and what do you drive?

SW: I live in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and drive a Hyundai Azura and BMW X5

MEF: What does your wife think about your flying?

SW: She enjoys me flying and says she feels more comfortable with me than any other pilot

MEF: Does anyone else in your family fly?

SW: My 24-year-old daughter, Amjad and 18-year-old son, Aziz, are both undergoing training in Florida, USA

MEF: Who or what has been your biggest influence in your flying?

SW: No one in particular.

MEF: What has been your biggest aviation achievement?

SW: In 2005 I won an award from Cessna for selling the most aircraft internationally in terms of value: US\$159 million in sales. They were also the most creative sales as most were to first time aircraft buyers.

MEF: Was there a time when you looked out of the cockpit and thought – this is what flying is all about?

SW: Every time I fly and see outside the aircraft I celebrate the freedom an aeroplane brings.

MEF: What is your favourite aircraft?

SW: Every Cessna Citation.

MEF: What aircraft in history would you most like to have flown?

SW: Without a doubt, Concorde. I have flown in the supersonic airliner 30 times and once sat on the flightdeck during takeoff thanks to a very helpful cabin attendant.

MEF: Do you have any unfulfilled ambitions in flying?

SW: To persuade everybody who can afford it, to buy an aeroplane – those that haven't are missing a lot.

MEF: What would you like to change in Middle East Aviation?

SW: I spend a lot of time trying to change attitudes towards flying in the region and would like to see the regulations eased. I try to demonstrate that aviation is good for investment and very helpful in running a business in the Kingdom.

MEF: Do you think the aviation industry in the Middle East is healthy?

SW: It is very healthy but I wish we had more support from the government, manufacturers and agents.

MEF: And lastly; please describe yourself in about fifty words.

SW: I always try to put myself in any situation that needs improvement and make it better as well as to help others participate. I am like many human beings in enjoying achieving goals. I also enjoy watching others benefit from dealing with me and hope that when I sell them something, they will get maximum usage and profit.