

# GENTLEMAN'S JOURNAL

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IS

## THE ROGUE ONE

British acting's New Hope for Star Wars

by HENRY TOBIAS JONES  
Photography by GARY HOULDER

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Aaron Taylor-Johnson  
FROM NOWHERE  
BOY TO TOM FORD



# THE SLIPSTREAM UBER

You can hire a cab at the click of a mobile phone icon, so why not a plane? Private jet hire is cruising into the app age, sometimes for considerably less than sky-high prices...

Words by **EDWIN SMITH**



Choose to book a flight with Victor's app and you are prompted to select the time and location of your departure, your destination and the number of seats required. A matter of seconds later, you are presented with an indication of the types of aircraft available and an estimate of the prices. A few minutes after that, an email arrives in your inbox with a more concrete quote and an invitation to book with a tap of the screen.

Should you and some friends wish to swap London for Cannes this weekend, for example, you can choose from a light jet such as a Citation Mustang that will take four of you there and back for £7,838, all the way up to a long-range Global Express XRS with room for 19 passengers. That would, however, set you back £100,753. 'All different types of aircraft are available,' says Jackson. 'If you want to have a boardroom in the sky because you're going to do a projection on board to brief your team on the way to a meeting in Milan, you can do that.' The company also has a section of its website dedicated to DJs and musicians who are planning tours.

Since launching in 2011, Victor has chalked up an average of 139% growth a year for the past four years, attracted £15m from angel investors including Sir Elton John, and has 7,000 aircraft on its books, but it is still some way away from being the biggest player in the market. NetJets, which is backed by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway, is several times the size of any of its competitors. However, the sage of Omaha's company uses a different model, with its 5,500 or so clients all paying a large upfront fee and a monthly stipend for fractional ownership of a particular aircraft.

There are, of course, plenty of different ways to skin a cat. JetSmarter offers users the chance to book seats on empty legs of private jet journeys for just a few hundred pounds with its app. And in 2013 Surf Air started offering California tech entrepreneurs (and anyone else with the requisite funds) unlimited flights between a handful of private airports on the West Coast in exchange for a monthly membership fee. Having been successful there, the company is now setting its sights on Europe. Beginning this winter, it will offer a similar deal for a number of destinations on this side of the Atlantic.

Strictly speaking, the planes

won't be private. In exchange for their £1,950 per month, Surf Air customers can expect a seat on a flight with four or five of their fellow members. But according to Surf Air's head honcho in Europe, Simon Talling-Smith, the luxury commodity on offer is the most valuable of all. 'All of our members have one thing in common,' he says. 'They value their time. They want to save time and they value the convenience of what something like Surf Air provides them. All of them have come to know the pain of travelling through large airports with commercial airlines.' Talling-Smith says customers can pull up to the tarmac as little as 15 minutes before take-off.

As with Victor and JetSmarter, booking on Surf Air flights is done with a simple, functional app. The company claims that you can be in the air within three hours of clicking 'book now'. And if you were to take an average of one trip a week, the cost per journey could be as little as £250. What's not to like?

Well, several companies in the US, including BlackJet, which was backed by Ashton Kutcher and Jay Z's company Roc Nation, and Beacon, which was set up by a Surf Air co-founder on the East Coast of the US, have found out the hard way that it's difficult to get the model to work. Both have recently folded.

But with several companies competing for your custom, now is the time to take advantage of the fact that it's almost as easy to book a private plane as it is to get a cab. Just don't get too comfortable in your bespoke calf-leather seat – some of the businesses that provide on-demand private(ish) air travel may yet experience turbulence. ■

THANKS TO THE MINIATURE COMPUTER you carry in your pocket, you can get pretty much whatever you want, wherever and whenever you want it. Everything from a cab (Uber) to a takeaway (Deliveroo) to a TV series (Netflix).

So if your desires happen to include something a shade more exclusive, there's no reason why they can't be fulfilled in the same way. As the CEO of Victor, a company that one might describe as 'Uber for private jets', Clive Jackson is on a mission to show that high-tech and the 'high touch' personalised service that ultra-high net worth individuals expect can go hand-in-hand. By using technology, he says, 'the experience is in no way lessened – it's enhanced.'



#### Silver screen

Victor's iOS app asks your desired destination, departure and number of seats required, and offers you an estimate for various private jet options. But once on board it promises the same luxury experience