

Keep an eye on the clock

Here's why doing so can help you get the most flight hours for your dollar

When you shop for an airline ticket, you probably don't consider the connection between travel time and the ticket cost because, generally, there isn't one. With fractional shares, however, your flight time directly affects your cost, so you need to pay close attention to it.

Your goal as a fractional shareholder should be to get the most time in the air in the most appropriate aircraft at the lowest cost. To achieve this, you need to carefully consider where, when and how often you fly; how many passengers you take; and whether you have special needs. Only then can you determine your best option.

Fractional operators sell shares in blocks of annual flight time—50 hours for a one-sixteenth share, 100 hours for a one-eighth share, 400 hours for a one-half share and so on. Thus, your first task is to determine how many hours you need. That's critical because if you buy too few, you'll later pay a premium for additional time and if you buy too many, you'll pay substantial amounts for time you don't use.

You might think that determining the right

20 percent of the time for which you've paid.

 **Short legs.** Flights of less than one hour are billed as one-hour trips. On a 30-minute flight, therefore, you'll be billed 60 minutes and thus will forfeit 50 percent of the time you purchased.

 **Interchange rates.** If you need a larger aircraft for a trip, the provider will send one, if it's available. However, it will calculate the flight time based on an "interchange rate" that reflects the increased cost of operating the larger airplane. That means your inventory of flight time may be reduced by 1.5 hours for each hour you travel. (Similarly, you may be charged less than one hour for each hour in a smaller aircraft, although the benefit of downgrading never seems quite as substantial as the cost of upgrading.) At any rate, if you purchase a share in the wrong aircraft and thus are forced to make frequent adjustments, this will have a substantial impact on your bank of flight hours.

 **Ferry fees.** If you fly outside your provider's "prime service area" (generally the contiguous United States plus

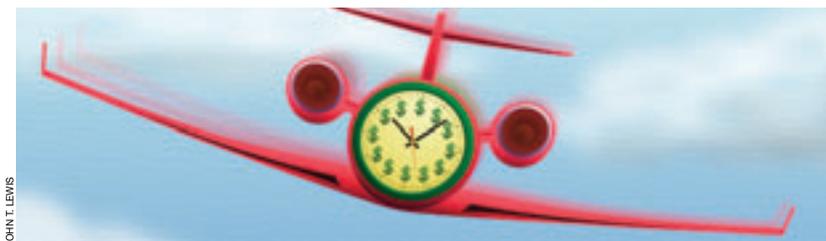
pilots throttle back, the fractional provider benefits on two fronts—lower fuel cost and more flight hours to debit from the shareholder's account.—Ed.]

 **Range.** An airplane with shorter range may require a fuel stop on longer trips. Larger aircraft may cruise at a higher speed and carry more fuel, and will be able to complete the same trip without a fuel stop.

 **Altitude.** Aircraft that can cruise at higher altitudes may be able to fly above bad weather rather than around it, which can save time. If you'll need to fly routes that are often affected by weather, you should look closely at the extent to which the available aircraft may be able to avoid weather delays and reroutings.

Several other time-related factors also merit consideration:

 **Call-in requirement.** Every fractional operator requires advance notice for each trip. Requiring eight hours' notice isn't uncommon, and on so-called "peak travel days" such as January 2 and the days before and after Thanksgiving and Christmas, you may have



number of hours requires only a simple calculation—the number of flights per year multiplied by the average number of hours per flight. However, it isn't that simple, because in the fractional world, an hour of billable flight time doesn't necessarily equal 60 minutes in the air. Indeed, there are many ways in which fractional investments leak their most precious resource—time:

 **Taxi time.** Fractional operators calculate flight time as "wheels up to wheels down," plus six minutes on either end for taxiing during takeoff and landing. So if you take a 60-minute flight, you'll be billed for one hour and 12 minutes. The taxi time represents

an additional 200 miles), you'll be charged for the cost of returning the aircraft to that area. Although this won't reduce your inventory of flight hours, it will add significantly to your cost.

In addition to these factors, you should consider the capabilities of the aircraft in which you might invest:

 **Size.** If you prefer large cabins, you may find that your aircraft can't take off or land at certain airports. While larger aircraft may fly faster, saving flight time, the trip to your ultimate destination may be longer because you must land at a less convenient airport.

 **Speed.** All things being equal, of course, a faster aircraft will shorten your flight. However, a faster aircraft will generally carry a higher price tag, which must be measured against the potential time savings. Further, not all providers fly their airplanes at their maximum cruising speeds, since doing so increases fuel consumption. [When the

While a larger aircraft may fly faster, your trip may take longer because you have to land at a less convenient airport.

to provide several days' notice. So if you decide to fly on the spur of the moment, your fractional provider may not be able to deliver an aircraft to you for several hours, if at all.

 **Provider's right to change your itinerary.** Every fractional provider reserves the right to delay or accelerate your departure. With some providers, these delays may be as much as one hour on non-peak travel days and three hours on peak days. With some providers, you may insist on a specific departure time if you're willing to incur an additional charge and/or a deduction in your flight hours in excess of actual flight time. However, that's a high price to pay for such convenience.

Once you understand your travel profile, you or your consultant can analyze the manner in which these and many other factors come into play to determine the best investment for you. You can also determine the concessions you want to negotiate that will be of most value to you—in terms of both cost savings and convenience. □

James Butler is an attorney and the chief executive officer of Shaircraft Solutions LLC (www.shaircraft.com), based in Bethesda, Md. Shaircraft represents individuals and corporations with respect to a wide range of private air travel investments.