

California Jet Buyer's Handbook

A considered path from mission to closing.



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Prepared by Jaken Finance Group. Editorial and business review: Jason Taken, aviation financing brokerage. Reviewed October 28, 2026. Transaction-specific tax, legal and operational advice requires the responsible qualified adviser.

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A practical guide to the decision

Build one transaction plan that connects the mission, aircraft, borrower and closing. Record who owns each unresolved item and what evidence will close it.

Use this guide with your transaction team

Mark each assumption as confirmed, provisional or unresolved. Assign a responsible person and a date to every material open item. Revisit the record when the aircraft, ownership entity, operating plan or financing structure changes.

Use this resource with qualified advisers for your transaction. Educational guidance does not replace tax, legal, technical or operational advice specific to the aircraft and facts.

Start with trips rather than a model name

List representative routes, passengers, baggage, departure windows, overnight stays and the airports genuinely relevant to the owner's ground destinations. Separate ordinary trips from the longest or most demanding occasional mission. A buyer who optimizes every purchase assumption for one rare flight may accept unnecessary recurring expense. Conversely, a cheap aircraft that routinely needs an unsuitable stop or substitute arrangement may fail the business purpose.

Have the flight team screen technical suitability

Give the trip matrix to a qualified operator or technical adviser for aircraft-specific evaluation using approved information and realistic conditions. Manufacturer headline range and a generic runway length are not sufficient. In California, coastal, desert and mountain destinations can produce different review questions. The acquisition resource should explain what evidence is needed without pretending to authorize a flight or establish performance.

Make an illustrative short list

Suppose the owner expects 80 annual trips: 60 short California trips, 15 longer domestic trips and five special missions. This is an illustrative planning set, not a demand forecast. Compare candidate aircraft for the 60 ordinary trips, then separately price a reasonable alternative for the five special missions. Show cabin, schedule, maintenance and operating assumptions alongside financial differences rather than choosing solely by maximum published range.

Turn the mission into purchasing instructions

Write a short acceptance brief that identifies mandatory features, acceptable compromises, crew expectations, base options and annual budget. Identify which items the inspector, operator, lender and insurer must each validate. Retain rejected options and reasons so the buyer can distinguish a deliberate compromise from an overlooked condition. Revisit the brief if the aircraft is expected to earn charter revenue or change operating use.

Working document to prepare

Prepare a mission worksheet with one row per representative trip and columns for passenger count, baggage, requested departure, destination ground address, overnight stay and flexibility. Add a separate technical-review outcome and the alternative if the trip cannot be completed as intended. Mark each requirement mandatory, preferred or occasional. This prevents an attractive model specification from silently replacing a buyer requirement and makes disagreements visible before search costs accumulate.

Build the complete acquisition budget

Begin with the agreed aircraft price, then show the proposed loan and buyer equity. Add each inspection, appraisal, escrow, legal, registration, insurance, delivery and initial service cost as a separate line. Label whether it is paid in cash, included in financing, paid already or merely a reserve. A single closing-cost percentage can conceal which assumptions actually apply to the transaction.

A cash reserve is money the buyer retains for future needs, not necessarily an amount paid to the seller or escrow. Show annual operating reserves, known maintenance and contingency separately. If an expense is already included in the aircraft price or a financed fee, do not add it again as cash. Obtain actual proposals for the selected aircraft rather than treating an example budget as a market quote.

Define the agreement before the deposit

Terms such as refundable, good faith or earnest money are not a complete description of the buyer's rights. Ask counsel to identify the exact events that permit return, create forfeiture exposure or require joint instructions. Distinguish technical acceptance, financing satisfaction, title clearance and closing. The escrow provider's role in holding funds is different from deciding a disputed contractual entitlement.

Record when the deposit is due, when inspection starts, when findings must be delivered and how rejection or extension notices must be sent. Confirm the parties and addresses authorized to receive notices. A substantive concern may not preserve rights if the agreed notice process is missed. Do not assume a phone call, broker text or financing delay automatically extends the contract.

Inspect the aircraft and its records

Have the technical adviser identify the aircraft, model, serial numbers, operating history and questions the review must answer. Request a written proposal distinguishing physical inspection, records review, component checks, ground or flight activity where appropriate, and excluded work. Confirm access, disassembly and return-to-service responsibilities. Do not assume the cheapest package or a recently completed maintenance event gives the buyer the same information.

The purchase agreement should be consistent with the proposed facility, timing, cost allocation and treatment of findings. Confirm who authorizes extra work, how discrepancies are classified and reported, and what happens if the inspection takes longer. Ask the lender and insurer whether they require additional evidence; their requirements may be different from the buyer's technical review.

Coordinate title, escrow and financing

A public aircraft inquiry helps identify registry information, but it should not be sold as proof of clear title. Engage an appropriate aircraft title provider and aviation counsel to define the required search, ownership chain, interests, exceptions and releases. Confirm the aircraft and relevant engine serial numbers. The technical inspector's findings and a lender's preliminary approval answer different questions.

Ask for a written report explaining what was searched, its effective time, outstanding matters and required actions. An old release, mismatched entity name or incomplete ownership document should remain visible until the responsible professional confirms the resolution. Do not assume a

seller's assurance, a paid invoice or the absence of a visible website entry resolves all possible interests.

Resolve California tax questions before delivery

A California dealer sale and an out-of-state or private-party acquisition can follow different collection paths. CDTFA describes use tax as the counterpart when aircraft are acquired for California use without California sales tax being paid to a dealer. An aircraft broker arranging a transaction is not automatically the retailer. The purchase agreement and closing statement should identify who is collecting which tax, rather than leaving that question to the aircraft delivery team.

Sales or use tax is an acquisition issue. County aircraft property tax is an annual assessment issue. Federal and California income-tax deductions are separate again. A buyer can have obligations in more than one system, and obtaining a deduction does not establish a use-tax exclusion. Put separate rows for each category in the purchase budget, identifying the adviser responsible for the number and whether the amount is confirmed or provisional.

Plan acceptance and the first ownership period

At handover, reconcile the accepted aircraft configuration, complete records, operating documents, program transfers and the access or equipment included in the agreement. Confirm the effective time of insurance and who is responsible for custody and operating decisions. Retain the final funds flow and evidence that the parties completed their closing obligations.

Assign the first ownership period's responsibilities: crew and training arrangements, scheduled maintenance, management reporting, hangar access and recurring payments. Review initial operating costs against the acquisition budget and preserve the delivery and flight records requested by the tax adviser. Resolve gaps promptly rather than treating delivery as the end of transaction administration.

Your decision worksheet

Build one transaction plan that connects the mission, aircraft, borrower and closing. Record who owns each unresolved item and what evidence will close it.

For each line, record the known facts, the evidence or quote supporting them, who is responsible for confirmation and the next action. Date each entry so that a later reader can distinguish a current quote from an old assumption.

Planning item	Evidence to gather	Decision to record
Mission and normal passenger load	A dated source, quote, agreement or adviser response	Confirmed / provisional / action required
California base and recurring destinations	A dated source, quote, agreement or adviser response	Confirmed / provisional / action required
Aircraft shortlist and exact configuration	A dated source, quote, agreement or adviser response	Confirmed / provisional / action required
Purchase budget and cash reserve	A dated source, quote, agreement or adviser response	Confirmed / provisional / action required
Financing conditions and maturity	A dated source, quote, agreement or adviser response	Confirmed / provisional / action required
Independent inspection scope	A dated source, quote, agreement or adviser response	Confirmed / provisional / action required
Title, escrow and delivery responsibilities	A dated source, quote, agreement or adviser response	Confirmed / provisional / action required
Written tax and insurance advice	A dated source, quote, agreement or adviser response	Confirmed / provisional / action required

Before you commit

Resolve material unknowns with the professional responsible for that subject before taking the next irreversible step. Keep aircraft technical acceptance, lender requirements, insurance and tax advice distinct in the transaction file.

Use the related calculators to compare a base case with a less favorable case. Bring the complete inputs and assumptions into the next conversation, rather than relying only on the headline result.

Your next-step checklist

- ☐ Mission and normal passenger load
- ☐ California base and recurring destinations
- ☐ Aircraft shortlist and exact configuration
- ☐ Purchase budget and cash reserve
- ☐ Financing conditions and maturity
- ☐ Independent inspection scope
- ☐ Title, escrow and delivery responsibilities
- ☐ Written tax and insurance advice

Working notes & adviser questions

Build one transaction plan that connects the mission, aircraft, borrower and closing. Record who owns each unresolved item and what evidence will close it.

Record a decision, the supporting evidence, the responsible adviser and the next action. Keep a copy with the dated transaction file.

Before the next commitment

What would change the decision? Which condition could delay closing? What additional cash would be needed in a less favorable case?

Sources & next steps

[AOPA aircraft acquisition resources](#)

[AOPA first-time aircraft buyers](#)

[AOPA purchase-agreement guidance](#)

[AOPA pre-purchase inspection guidance](#)

[AOPA records checklist](#)

[FAA Aircraft Registry](#)

[FAA International Registry entry-point process](#)

[Aircraft purchase tax guide](#)

[Regulation 1620: Interstate and Foreign Commerce](#)

The complete HTML edition uses the same structured content and is available at </buying/california-jet-buyers-handbook/>.

Primary sources support the relevant facts; original planning frameworks and examples remain illustrative.

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Submit a deal or arrange a financing call

Email an initial deal summary to jason@jakenaviation.com or call 833-264-7776. Include the aircraft, purchase price or value, financing request, available equity, intended use, California connection and timing.

Use the appropriate secure channel for sensitive supporting documents. Any lender decision requires separate review, documentation and current terms.

[Request a financing call](#)

[Explore documented program information](#)