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Living like a millionaire and owning a jet

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"Invest in a Winning Horse ... at a Fraction of the Cost," I read. I thought it was the catch line of a story about fractional ownership of a luxurious private jet and that it would describe how one is able to be part of the "high life" at a fraction of the cost. But the feature continued that going to the races is a pretty fun way to spend a day. I agree. I also admit that it was the wrong article for me, but I continued reading it nevertheless.

Can you imagine? Shared ownership of a racehorse? Just like an aircraft, you own a share of the noble animal, and all of the running costs, like trainer, jockey, transport and race-entry fee, are handled by the fractional ownership company. There are even more benefits, such as stable visits, paddock tours on race days and invitations to owner enclosures. When was the last time you got a tour of an airport and the maintenance hangars? To top it all off, you may have a chance to visit the winner's enclosure if you are lucky. It is as if you are signing up for a shared jet ownership and with the contract, you will get a lottery ticket. But as the old saying goes, "One should only bet what one is willing to lose."

Is the shared ownership of a jet a wise decision? It definitely has pros and cons. The positive side is that the fractional owner suffers only a fraction of what the full owner suffers, and the negative side is that the fractional owner only enjoys a fraction of what the full owner enjoys. This principle may help you make your decision. What more is there to say anyway? If you want to be a part-time millionaire you have to be able to live with the benefits and the disadvantages of it.

The shared jet ownership is a concept that is developed by Richard Santulli, who has a bachelor's and a master's in mathematics and, therefore, knows that the word "fraction" originates from the Latin fractus, which represents "part of a whole" – you know, like a wedge of pizza. What was considered an innovative idea when setting up the shared aircraft operator Netjets in 1986 was based on the text in the chapter "Kalasavarna" (fractions) of the "Sthananga-Sutra" mathematics, believed to be written in 300 BC in India. As can be expected from an academically educated mathematician, Santulli mastered the art of adding one and one and getting three as a result. Bringing mathematics and jet ownership together was a dynamic that innovators often use by bringing two matters from different angles, industry or expertise together and creating a win-win situation that is not thought of before. If, in 300 BC India, they would have had a vehicle to go to the skies, they might have become the inventors of fractional ownership of such flying bodies. I can assure you that what I'm saying here is based on pure mathematical logic.

Warren Buffet, the investor behind Berkshire Hathaway, the company that owns Netjets, wrote to the shareholders that he had sold the Berkshire plane and would go for shared ownership only. "Warren Buffett is currently the third richest person in the world. And he still doesn't own a private jet," the Netjets promotions proudly state. So, what's the big deal here? I don't own one either, and I'm not even listed among the super rich. However, Warren has what I don't have: He is known to have a reputation for prudence, integrity and a relentless focus on value. Therefore, it would not surprise me that the real and simple reason for his buying Netjets in 1998 was that he recognized the value of living like a millionaire, even if it is only part-time.

- Cdr. Bud Slabbaert is an author and a columnist specializing in business aviation and yachting. He is working on a series of humorous stories about "St.Tosia: the island Columbus forgot," a fictitious island in the Caribbean. He can be reached at cdrbud@gmail.com.