

The New York Times

June 27, 2006

Frequent Flier When First Class Is the Only Class

By BUTCH WALKER

PEOPLE think that flying on a private jet lets you avoid all of the hassles of commercial air travel: long delays, difficult passengers and problems with security. But that's not always true.

The other day Avril Lavigne and her fiancé, Deryck Whibley, invited me to fly to Las Vegas for the weekend with a few of her friends. So I showed up at the Burbank airport, and there was a Hollywood who's who waiting to board a 75-seat private plane.

I was sitting next to Seth Green, the actor. And of course the Hilton sisters were there, too. They can't miss anything.

I travel all the time — usually on a regularly scheduled airline. I play about 200 concerts a year, most in Canada, Japan, England and here in the States. But this was nothing like being on a commercial flight, even if you're up in first class.

None of us had to worry about being frisked by [Transportation Security Administration](#) agents before we boarded. And for a guy like me, who has enough jewelry to set off a magnetometer in the next terminal, that's an advantage. But the Hiltons don't go anywhere without their own private air marshals, these two enormous men. I think people were afraid to sit next to them.

When you're on a private jet, you're flying the liberal skies. There were beautiful flight attendants coming down the aisle with Champagne bottles, filling your glass whenever it was empty. The service was friendly and accommodating. It's like being in a limousine, with wide leather seats and padded tables.

But the passengers also treat the plane as if it's a hotel room, and they do anything they want. I won't go into all the unsavory details. Let's just say you can move around the cabin without the normal constraints. It wasn't unusual to see one passenger sitting in another passenger's lap, without being scolded by a flight attendant.

Our return flight to Burbank was delayed because one V.I.P. sent her personal assistant out to fetch a burger before takeoff. The crew waited patiently without

complaining, because that's what they were being paid for. The rest of us complained.

I have to admit that I've taken advantage of the liberal skies, too. A few years ago, I was flying to a music festival on the same plane as Britney Spears — this was a pre-pregnancy, very much underage Britney — and I decided to play a practical joke on her.

I wrote a letter in which I confessed that I was her biggest fan and gave her my phone number. I asked one of the flight attendants to deliver it to her. Britney didn't take it very well. She squirmed uncomfortably in the back of the plane, and when we landed, they whisked her away immediately.

On a commercial flight you can get yourself cuffed and thrown into the galley for looking at another passenger the wrong way. But on this private jet, I disembarked without incident and played my gig.

Britney never returned the love and she ended up marrying the other guy. But I can't say I didn't try.

As told to Christopher Elliott.

Private Jet Services Group (PJSJG) acts as agent for our clients in negotiating and facilitating transportation with licensed air carriers. We have no affiliation with any carrier except that our sister company, Private Jet Management Group (PJMG), may act as agent for one or more carriers. Transportation to be furnished by any PJMG-represented carrier will be arranged through the interaction of PJSJG on behalf of its client and PJMG on behalf of the carrier.