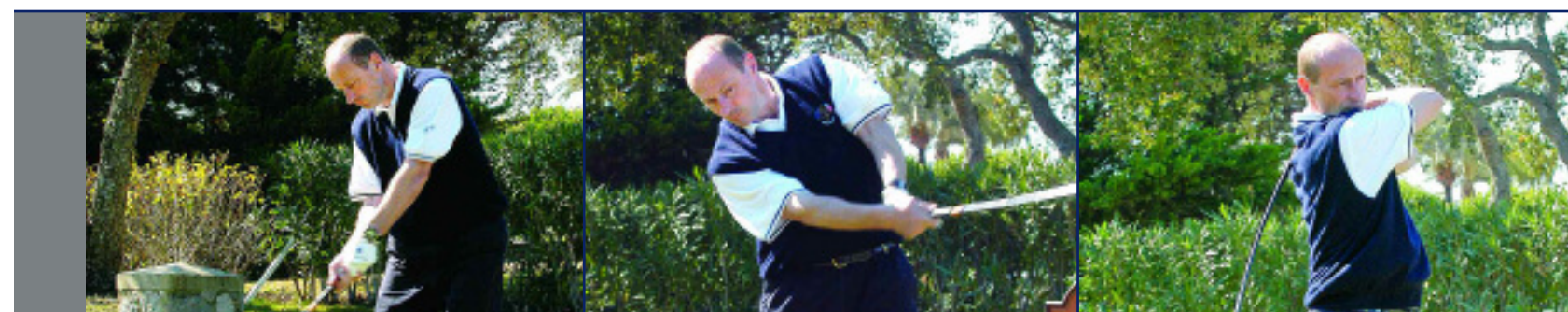


X C L U S I V E
P E O P L E

Matthew Lawrence



Property developer pilot and captain of industry



Matthew Lawrence is the kind of mild-mannered, unassuming and thoroughly pleasant man that is instantly likeable. Dressed in a beautifully tailored suit and walking around the garden of his Sotogrande villa with his mobile to one ear, he seems just like any of the number of businessmen who have made this part of the southern Spanish coast home.

However, Matthew Lawrence is not just any businessman. Far from it. A millionaire many times over, he set up his first business at the tender age of 22 and has the sort of daring and cavalier spirit for which the word 'entrepreneurial' could have been invented. He now enjoys an impressive portfolio of business ventures and, with wife Nicky, has three beautiful daughters between the ages of 4 and 16. Take in to account that the Sotogrande property is, in fact, one of the principal villas on the chic Avenida Los Cortijos and the family share their time between here and their lavish home in Warwickshire, England, and it could be very difficult to like Matthew Lawrence. He is the classic 'man who has it all.' Yet, such is Matthew's charm and sense of adventure, that his story becomes inspirational rather than infuriating.

Educated in Maidenhead, Berkshire, Matthew went on to study at Windsor College but, surprisingly in light of his achievements since, he insists that he was never keen on studying and did not really put his mind to education at all until he was 13. Even so, he sailed through school and college before taking the business world by storm.

"My first business started as a very simple concept. We designed point of sale audiovisual equipment and sold the advertising space on it. We then progressed to designing and building electronics for other companies. We produced products as diverse as energy control systems and hospital equipment for maternity care."

The company was honoured with a myriad of awards and Matthew saw the opportunity to expand. "I had a mail order division for my electronics company and I sourced a lot of my products from the Far East. After a couple of years, I merged my business with one of my Hong Kong suppliers. We designed the products in England and then tooled them in China, resulting in products that looked European but were built at

Chinese prices."

The company became the largest worldwide supplier of washroom accessories. Matthew jokes, "I still see products that we manufacture in restaurants and other outlets throughout the world. I even came across one in a Tesco's store recently. In 1996, I decided I was ready for a new challenge so I moved back from Hong Kong and set up a business in Gibraltar." Matthew's love affair with that part of the world actually began a few years earlier. He first started going to Spain in 1993 and on one of those occasions, when visiting clients in Gibraltar, he decided to stop in Sotogrande on the way. He fell for the area and, five years ago, bought his villa. "It is the tranquillity that really drew me to it," says Matthew. "I get so much work done when I am here. It is an idyllic environment. I love going to restaurants, my favourite one in Sotogrande is Barlovento. I also spend quite a few evenings playing a bit of golf on my own. It is very therapeutic."

For those that know Matthew, it may seem strange that he was attracted by the calm and serenity of this corner of Spain, as he is, by his own admission, a devotee of the highlife.

I've never really looked at my life like that

ready for delivery, at any one time. At this point, Matthew provides a unique, hands-on service and flies the aircraft directly to his customers.

With an ability to turn everything he touches in to gold, teamed with that daredevil, adventurous character, it was inevitable that Matthew would be compared to that other high flying tycoon, Richard Branson. This is a comparison that he is keen to avoid. "I've never really looked at my life like that. I do have a lot of admiration for Richard but I think there is an awful lot of luck in life and he has had the lion's share."

Unlike Branson, who has made a conscious effort throughout his career to associate himself with famous personalities in order to up his own and his companies' status (an ill-advised appearance on Baywatch springs to mind), Matthew refuses to be drawn on the question of celebrity friends. "I have a number of friends in different circles, including that one, but I would never dream of naming names." This is the kind of understated response that is typical of Matthew. While he undoubtedly possesses an astute business brain and a flair for making companies work, the integrity that Matthew radiates must go a long way to explain his success. A success he is now repeating with his own property development company, Amiri, based in Sotogrande.

"Amiri came about because we wanted to create a lifestyle brand around which to sell homes. We wanted to offer properties built to northern European building standards, as I have not come across any other company that uses these techniques."

Amiri properties are now, arguably, the most desirable and in demand on the coast. This is, in part at least, due to meticulous attention to detail, whether it is the ergonomics of a door handle or the combination of textures used on interiors. That they are held in such high regard also owes to the fact that Amiri employs its own construction teams flown in from Germany, Holland and Portugal, which produce high standards of work without compromise.

Such is Matthew's reputation in the property industry, that David Ward, the construction manager responsible for the magnificent Sandy Lane Hotel in Barbados, has joined him at Amiri. Together they make a formidable team that, thanks to Amiri's unrivalled standing, is given the opportunity to build in the finest locations southern Spain has to offer.

Amiri has two collections of properties available; the Premier Collection, 1.5 to 2 million euros, and the Exclusive Collection, which vary between 5 and 7 million euros. The quality of these constructions is exceptionally high and, even, admired by fellow members of the industry. "At the 'Homes Overseas Property Awards,' held recently at the Dorchester Hotel in London, we were the only company to receive the Silver Award for the use of technology, as well as a Silver Award for Best Spanish Property for a villa in Pedro Algrande."

When Matthew talks about his companies and achievements, his whole face lights up. Perhaps, then, it is neither his acumen, his sense of adventure, his way with people nor his veracity that make him successful, maybe it's just his sheer lust for life. Again, the pupils grow wide and the eyes sparkle as, always looking for the potential to expand, he launches in to his plans for the future.

"We are going to be developing Amiri Properties in other parts of the world, such as Barbados and Courcheval. These are other areas comparable with Sotogrande." Slightly closer to home, he is looking at Sandbanks in the South of England, which is amongst the five most sought after areas in Great Britain for property buyers.

His plans for Senate Aviation are equally ambitious. "We have bought some land in Bournemouth, which we have already been granted planning permission on to create high tech aviation. I have great hopes for this side of the business."

When Matthew Lawrence says he has high hopes for something, you can be fairly certain that the project will not fail. Whatever he touches, whether electronics, direct mail, property or aviation, seems to quickly transform in to a multimillion-turnover business. More satisfyingly still though, each project he is involved in equally rapidly gains a reputation for being the best and most reliable in its field. He may not like the comparison, but Matthew is every bit the charismatic entrepreneur that Richard Branson has come to personify, and could even go on to become the property or aviation equal to Bill Gates.

Most refreshingly of all, you get the impression when talking to Matthew Lawrence that were he not a successful businessman, if he did not have the stacks of cash and were he travelling on budget airlines rather than his own jet, he would still have the sense of fun, adventure and enthusiasm that define him more than any of his businesses.

The only question left is what Matthew will find next to quench his daredevil desires. Surely a jet plane will not hold him forever. Should Senate Aviation ever choose to move in to space travel, I think we all know who will be manning that first rocket.



For starters, he is a very sharp dresser and frequents stores such as Armani and Hugo Boss. "Whilst I am away from Spain I love going on shopping sprees. My favourite shop, however, is called Sakks in Southampton. I've been going there for about 15 years."

There are also the cars - a top of the range Bentley Arnage and a Porsche to be precise. Although threads and motors are the least of his expenses, given Matthew's other pricey hobby. Four years ago, he decided that being a high flyer in business was not enough and, so, took the matter quite literally in to his own hands and gained his pilot's licence. That was still not sufficient to sate his desire, though, and he went on to qualify as a commercial pilot. He has now notched up an impressive amount of flying hours across Africa, USA and Europe.

"After I got my licence, I bought my first plane, a Piper Archer, and my flying instructor and I took to the sky for the next two weeks." He bought a second and a third aircraft, both twin engines. There was only one more thing he could do and, a couple of years later, Matthew took the plunge and

purchased a private jet. He admits that, whilst learning to fly, there were a few hair-raising moments but they haven't been enough to dissuade him from the fast lifestyle he loves so much.

He regularly attends driving courses including the white knuckle Maserati race day and is a member of the Fiorano Club that arranges flat out racing on tracks. He is also a keen skier and has done a few parachute jumps. "I really didn't take to that. I feel much safer in the cockpit than jumping from it. Although I did heliski in Canada which was an amazing experience."

It was while learning to fly that the idea for Senate Aviation evolved. Recently established and based at Bournemouth Airport, Senate Aviation already holds the sole distributorship for Piper Aircraft throughout England, the Channel Islands, Ireland and Spain. It sells aircrafts, specialist parts and is also responsible for sourcing aircraft for individuals. It is typical of Matthew's companies in that it has built up a reputation that is second to none. The small team has been pulled from leading aircraft manufacturers and they can have up to a dozen planes, all

