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MAY 2025



Emirates *Spreads its Wings of Carbon*

Story by SIMONE CHELLINI
Photography by CLEMENT ALLOING

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Airline Review
Air Astana



AIR ASTANA



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DEPARTING SHOT





In recent weeks, in the wake of the DCA midair collision that killed 67 people over the Potomac River, a lobbying group representing airlines in the United States urged Congress to increase Air Traffic Control (ATC) funding to mitigate the issues of congestion and delays and improve air safety.

However, the group seems to have missed a glaring issue: what are the actual root causes of ATC inefficiencies? Without recognizing, admitting, and addressing the fundamental drivers of ATC workload, any initiative to hire more controllers will inevitably yield the same subpar outcomes.

Instead of simply hiring more controllers, the focus should be on the real-time optimization of air traffic flows—actively managing day-of-flight trajectories in order to mitigate congestion and delays. Doing this would benefit all stakeholders: airlines, passengers, employees, investors, and the communities served.

Consider this: in 2023, the US saw nearly 1.5 million flight delays, and ATC-related issues accounted for over 30% of them. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has projected a 50% increase in air traffic by 2040, which means that the current system will only become more strained if the ongoing inefficiencies remain unaddressed.

Another major issue is the misallocation of funds within the Airport and Airways Trust Fund (AATF). Although the AATF collects nearly US\$16 billion annually, it is often used as a budget-balancing tool instead of for rational investments in airport and airway ecosystems, which is its intended purpose.

To be clear, this is not to support any radical overhaul of air traffic control in the new US government administration, nor to endorse any downsizing of essential personnel in favor of an unproven AI-driven approach. The safety and efficiency of the US airspace depend on trained air traffic controllers who make real-time decisions—something automation alone cannot replace (the 2002 Überlingen crash sadly proved this). Modernization is necessary, but the solution is not mass firings or corporate self-dealing. Instead, we should equip ATCs with cutting-edge tools, improve training programs, and implement a legal framework suited to ensure safety and efficiency in the skies.

The bottom line is that simply focusing on the number of controllers will not alleviate congestion and delays at US airports. What will? A proactive approach, centered on real-time optimization. If the goal is to enhance efficiency and improve the outcomes for all parties involved, then a data-driven, root-cause-focused strategy is the only path forward.

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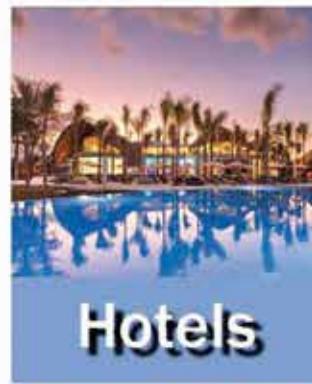
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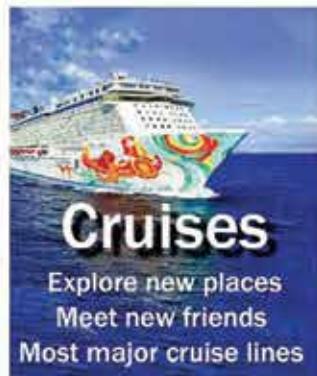
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ON THE COVER

As Emirates integrates the Airbus A350 into its fleet, the aircraft serves as the foundation for a new era—one defined by fuel efficiency, advanced cabin technology, and long-haul flexibility. With its carbon fiber fuselage and wings, the twinjet is not just another addition to the fleet—it's the platform for Emirates' future.

PHOTO CLEMENT ALLOING

 airwaysmag



New footage released by the Italian Air Force shows American Airlines flight AA292 being escorted by Eurofighters as it diverts to Rome Fiumicino due to a reported bomb threat. The flight was en route from New York JFK to Delhi.



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① LUIS DAVID SANCHEZ - ATL



② JETBLUE AIRWAYS

① DELTA AIR LINES

**AIRBUS A321-271NX
N589DT MSN 12417**

Delta Air Lines (DL) is celebrating its 100th anniversary with a special silver livery on its Airbus A321neo aircraft. The "100 Years" design is seen here in Atlanta (ATL) upon delivery from Hamburg Finkenwerder (XFW).

② JETBLUE

**AIRBUS A320-232
N561JB MSN 1927**

JetBlue (B6), in partnership with Nintendo, has introduced a bright, colorful Airbus A320 design—"Cloudtop Cruiser"—featuring the Mario, Princess Peach, Luigi, Bowser, Donkey Kong, and Yoshi videogame characters.



③ JETBLUE AIRWAYS

③ JETBLUE

**AIRBUS A321-231(WL)
N970JB MSN 7415**

As part of its 26th anniversary celebration, JetBlue (B6) has debuted its special BlueUnity livery in tribute to crewmembers, who have been at the heart of the airline's success for the past 25 years.

4

BINTER CANARIAS

**EMBRAER E190-E2
EC-OKB MSN 19020163**

Binter Canarias (NT) has taken delivery of its 15th Embraer E195-E2. This brings the carrier's total fleet to 41 planes and strengthens its connectivity between the Canary Islands and mainland Spain.

5

EDELWEISS AIR

**AIRBUS A320-232
HB-JJL MSN 2606**

The first Airbus A320 in the new Edelweiss (WK) livery has emerged from the paint shop in Norwich, UK, and is back in service on short and medium-haul routes. The red color extends further up the fuselage and the 'Edelweiss' titles are in a darker shade, while sleek curved lines on the nose add a dramatic touch.

6

AIRBALTIC

**AIRBUS A220-300
YL-ABX MSN 55329**

airBaltic (BT) has unveiled a special livery for its milestone Airbus A220-300. The 50th jet of the type in BT's fleet features an artistic interpretation of the Latvian flag with other elements representing Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the three Baltic States.



4 JAVIER RODRIGUEZ - PMI



5 JAVIER RODRIGUEZ - PMI



6 AIR BALTIK



7 JOE G. WALKER - BFI



8 DIRK GROTHE - HAJ



9 DIRK GROTHE - HAM

**7
NORWEGIAN AIR SWEDEN
AOC**

**BOEING 737-8
SE-RTV MSN 44877 LN 9058**

Norwegian Air Sweden AOC (D8) has revised its livery with the latest addition to the fleet. It features a sans-serif font and drops the .com from the front, rear, and tail blue cheatline. A mountain range adorns the tail.

**8
AUSTRIAN AIRLINES**

**BOEING 777-2Q8(ER)
OE-LPF MSN 28692 LN 373**

To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Johann Strauss, Austrian Airlines (OS)—together with Hannover Airport, Challenge Technic, and LXM Aero—has decorated an OS Boeing 777-200(ER) for the annual Vienna Tourist Board 'King of Waltz. Queen of Music' celebration.

**9
SUNEXPRESS**

**BOEING 737-8K5(WL)
TC-SPF MSN 39093 LN 3601**

The SunExpress (XQ) Boeing 737-800 adorned with the colorful 'Campaign' livery is back in service after almost three years in storage in Türkiye. The aircraft was leased from Russia's GTLK, but stored because of the economic sanctions imposed over the Russia-Ukraine war.



10 DANIEL SANDER - GLA



11 BART LEKEU - BRU

**10
ENTER AIR****BOEING 737-8
SP-EXK MSN 64508 LN 7237**

Polish carrier Enter Air (B4) is operating a Boeing 737-8 leased from Avolon. The aircraft features a hybrid livery incorporating elements from India's SpiceJet (SG). The airliner was previously registered as VT-MXG.



12 ROBERT DUMITRESCU - ATH

**11
GULLIVAIR****AIRBUS A330-232
LZ-TWO MSN 493**

Bulgarian operator GullivAir (G2) has added a second Airbus A330-200. Leased from FTAI, it was originally delivered to LTU (LT) in 2002, and features a hybrid livery in the colors of the now-defunct French carrier Aigle Azur (ZI).

**12
AEGEAN****AIRBUS A321-271NX
SX-NAC MSN 10189**

Aegean (A3) is expanding its Airbus A320neo family order book with a firm order for eight additional A321neos, bringing the total to 60 aircraft. The order, announced in early March, is the third enlargement of the carrier's 2018 agreement for the aircraft type.



13 JOE G. WALKER - BFI



14 JOE G. WALKER - BFI



15 JOE G. WALKER - BFI

13 AIR INDIA EXPRESS

BOEING 737-8
VT-BWM MSN 61448 LN 7508

Air India Express (IX) has been putting into service the Boeing 737-8s it acquired as part of a 470-aircraft-strong fleet renewal order placed by the Air India Group in the 2023 Paris Air Show. Fifty-five of these aircraft were from a batch completed for Chinese carriers but never delivered (what are known in the industry as white tails).

Air India Express, a subsidiary of the Air India (AI) national airline, focuses on low-cost international and domestic flights. Its growing fleet recently reached 100 aircraft.

14 AIR INDIA EXPRESS

BOEING 737-8
VT-BWI MSN 61652 LN 7826

15 AIR INDIA EXPRESS

BOEING 737-8
VT-BWL MSN 63278 LN 7511

16

MITSUBISHI AIRCRAFT CORPORATION

SPACEJET (MRJ90) JA23MJ MSN 10003

According to reports, Mitsubishi plans to display one of its SpaceJet (former MRJ) regional jet aircraft. The program, announced in 2007, faced technical and strategic difficulties that led to delays in deliveries. In the face of that, the entire project was cancelled in October 2021.

17

PATTAYA AIRWAYS

ATR 72-500(F) HS-PAW MSN 745

Two former CCM Airlines (XK) ATR 72-500s have found a new home in Thailand with Pattaya Airways (PTW). The aircraft, leased from ACIA Aero Leasing, were converted into freighters to serve PTW routes between Thailand and Myanmar.

18

KOREAN AIR

BOEING 787-10 HL8515 MSN 66878 LN 1152

Korean Air (KE) introduced a new corporate identity on March 11, revealing a modernized version of its signature 'Taegeuk' symbol. The redesigned deep blue emblem reflects KE's heritage while embracing contemporary aesthetics.



16 ROBERTO LEIRO – FAB



17 DIRK GROTHE – UTP



18 KOREAN AIR



PHOTO NEWS

AIR ASTANA: SURPASSING EXPECTATIONS



Story and Photos
ROBERTO LEIRO





2

● Peter Foster became Air Astana boss in 2005–20 years ago—making him one of the most senior airline leaders in the industry. // AIR ASTANA

● The Airbus A320neo family aircraft has become the backbone of Air Astana's operations. In total, the Air Astana Group fleet (Air Astana and FlyArystan) consists of 60 aircraft to date. // ALBERTO CUCINI

● Almaty International Airport is one of the two hubs for Air Astana, and provides passengers a gateway to the cultural and economic center of Kazakhstan. // GLEB OSOKIN

● In 2019, Air Astana merged the previously separate training and education opportunities under the internal umbrella brand 'Air Astana Academy, with locations in Almaty and Astana. In the picture it is seen a cabin mockup for cabin crew service training in Almaty..

● Air Astana operated five Boeing 757-200. The aircraft type was retired in 2020 and replaced by the Airbus A321LR. // IAIN MARSHALL



3

KAZAKHSTAN, THE WORLD'S LARGEST

landlocked country, is a vibrant Central Asian nation steeped in history and cultural richness. Once home to nomadic tribes and a vital trading post along the Silk Road between Europe and Asia, it boasts a heritage rooted in horse culture, traditional yurts, and hospitality. Its vast steppes, majestic mountains, and modern cities like Almaty and the futuristic capital, Astana, blend ancient traditions and innovation.

Kazakh culture treasures communal meals like *beshbarmak* (a dish of boiled meat and pasta) and ceremonies like *Nauryz*, which celebrates the spring equinox. Traditional music, often played on the *dombra*—a long-necked string instrument—is integral to national identity, as are crafts like felt-making and embroidery. Despite the negative stereotypes attributed to satirical movies (looking at you, *Borat*), Kazakhstan is a sophisticated and diverse country of over 20 million people. It is proud of its independence, natural beauty, and multicultural society, making it a true crossroads of history and modernity.

Kazakhstan's economy has recently experienced significant growth, thanks largely to the abundant natural resources. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is

projected to reach approximately US\$307 billion in 2025, with a per capita GDP of US\$15,110.

The discovery of substantial oil and gas reserves since the early 2000s has been pivotal. The Kashagan Field in the northern Caspian Sea is one of the world's largest oil fields. It has positioned the country as an increasingly important player in the global energy market.

Beyond hydrocarbons, Kazakhstan possesses some of the world's largest mineral reserves, including uranium, chromium, lead, and zinc. This mineral wealth has positioned the country as a key player in the global energy and mining sectors.

But, despite its growing wealth and geopolitical relevance, Kazakhstan remains largely unknown to the broader world, and draws few tourists. Yet, an airline is seeking to deepen the country's connectivity with the rest of the world.

MEET AIR ASTANA

Air Astana (KC), Kazakhstan's flag carrier, made its first flight from Astana (NQZ) to Almaty (ALA) in 2002. Ever since, it has charted a path of resilience and growth. Today, as it awaits the delivery of more Boeing 787



Dreamliners and Airbus A320 family aircraft, KC is navigating complex geopolitical dynamics and is positioning itself strategically for the future.

Air Astana was conceived in 2001 as a joint venture between Kazakhstan's sovereign wealth fund, Samruk-Kazyna, and UK's BAE Systems, with a total investment of US\$17 million (US\$30 million in today's figures). The airline's launch coincided with Kazakhstan's broader efforts to modernize after gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

For years beforehand, the country's air transport sector had suffered from government neglect and poor investments. At the time Air Astana was established, Kazakhstan's aviation history was marred with failed airlines, a poor safety record, failing airport infrastructure, and an outdated regulatory framework unsuited to the needs of the newborn nation.

Despite these obstacles, KC rapidly expanded its domestic and international network. Initially, the government granted Air Astana the route network of Air Kazakhstan (9Y). From there, KC quickly sourced three Boeing 737-700s to serve its international destinations and leased five Fokker 50s for domestic flights. Within a few years, KC's fleet grew to include Airbus, Boeing, and Embraer aircraft.

7 Air Astana was the last customer in taking delivery of a factory-fresh Boeing 767-300 in passenger configuration. The airline plans to keep the type in operation until 2027, once the 787 Dreamliners have joined the fleet. // ALBERTO CUCINI

Building the fleet around Western-built aircraft greatly furthered Air Astana's operational reliability, safety, and passenger experience. By 2007, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) granted KC its first IOSA (Operational Safety Audit), a certification it has maintained ever since. As of this writing, Air Astana has never had a fatal crash.

Under the leadership of Peter Foster, who became CEO in the autumn of 2005, taking over from Lloyd Paxton, Air Astana embarked on a strategy to become a world-class airline with its own ecosystem, including a complete training center and state-of-the-art maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) premises.

Today, Air Astana is thriving. Its network boasts more than 90 domestic and international destinations, spanning as far east as Beijing and west to London.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

Speaking to Airways at Air Astana's Almaty headquarters, Foster explained how Air Astana is steadily working to cope with the current geopolitical challenges while growing its fleet and route portfolio.

Foster is proud of the success of its Initial Public Offering (IPO), launched in February 2024. The company is listed on the Kazakhstan Stock Exchange, Astana International Exchange, and London Stock Exchange.

"We no longer have a majority shareholder," he said. "For 22 years, we had two shareholders. Now, we've got over 60,000 institutional and retail investors."

"We are doing good," Foster continued. "The first six months [of 2024] were pretty solid. We had a, give or take, 12% increase in revenue, performance, and capacity. The booking curve for our peak season, in July versus the first half of September, has been very positive."

Despite the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic, Air Astana returned to profitability in 2021. For 2023, the Air Astana Group recorded a net profit of US\$68.7 million on a turnover of US\$1.2 billion. In the first semester of 2024, the total revenue and other income, excluding non-recurring items, increased to US\$586.2 million. In total, 2024 revenue increased by 12.4% to US\$1.308 million. "The narrative has been the topping out of the post-COVID-19 boom in many





8 Air Astana is preparing the introduction of Boeing 787 operations in late 2025. The carrier has upgauged to the larger 787-9, instead of the originally planned 787-8. // THE BOEING COMPANY

9 Air Astana confirmed its plans to phase out the last three Embraer E190-E2s, once ended the leasing terms.

10 **11** **12** Air Astana has become the first Kazakh carrier to carry out a heavy maintenance 12-year C-check, which was carried out on a company's Airbus A321. // AIR ASTANA

respects. We did do well after the pandemic." Foster explained that "we came out of COVID-19 [travel restrictions] much earlier than everybody else because the Kazakh government allowed people to start flying reasonably freely." The government's decision to lift the travel restrictions helped Air Astana avoid the sudden surge in travel demand experienced by other airlines in the United States and Europe.

"We had much flatter, good growth spread over a wider period of time," Foster said, "and therefore, it was less precipitous than many of the other airlines."

Foster believes his air travel market is merely at the beginning of its growth potential. "Back in 2019, when we launched FlyArystan [FS], Kazakh nationals traveled on







13

average 0.2 trips per year on an airplane, and that's for a country that's among the biggest in the world." At over one million square miles (2.72 million km²), it is the ninth largest country on the planet and could fit the whole of Western Europe inside it with room to spare. If you take a flight from Astana to Frankfurt, around half of the 2,600-mile (4330km) journey would be spent overflying Kazakhstan.

Despite the strong numbers and optimistic forecast for the next years, the CEO expressed some concerns. "The sector has been quite badly affected by inflation across the world and supply chain issues at the OEMs. There's not one single OEM that doesn't have these problems in one form or another."

CONSERVATIVE GROWTH

Narrow-bodies, particularly Airbus A320-family aircraft,



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are a big part of Air Astana's strategy. "While Central Asia and Kazakhstan are growth markets, the aggregate market size is still pretty small," Foster pointed out. "So, it's a much safer option if we [serve the destinations] with narrow-

bodies. We only use Boeing 767s in our European summer schedule. They are what we call a high-season aircraft."

Foster said that Air Astana's market expansion is not driven by aircraft availability. Instead,

13 14 15 16 Air Astana flight training center is the first in Central Asia to be certified by the European Aviation Safety Agency. It's able to train pilots on the L3 Harris Reality Seven full-sight simulator. It also features a Cabin Emergency Evacuation Trainer for Pilots and Cabin Crews.



17 18 19 Air Astana counts with a real fire fighting trainer (RFFT) simulator in its Flight Training Center. It has the capability to simulate various practical fire-related emergency situations as part of the training of cabin crews and Pilots.





the airline prefers to avoid the risk of flying larger aircraft with empty seats.

This conservative approach has resulted in Air Astana having an eclectic mix of routes centered around a new business and leisure traveler. The so-called 'Bleisure' trend combines both types of travel, often as a result of adding days to work trips. The trend took hold after the COVID-19 pandemic, as remote work and flexible schedules became more common. "It's always very difficult to work out exactly who's a business traveler, who's a leisure traveler, [or] who's a holiday-maker," Foster said.

One strong trend is growth in the Indian market. Indian nationals—along with other 60+ nationalities worldwide—do not require a visa to travel to Kazakhstan. According to the most recent IATA data, Indian passenger traffic is growing at a stable rate of 3.8% year over year. Foster said that connections to Europe, particularly Germany, are also growing. Astana has a category it calls 'Ethnic German Business', the result of a diaspora of Germans who used to live in Kazakhstan and now travel back and forth.

Air Astana's principal hub is in Almaty, and its secondary one in Astana is strongly business-oriented. From Beijing (PEK) to Abu Dhabi (AUH) and Dubai (DXB), these routes cater to Kazakhstan's strong commercial relations, particularly in the oil, gas, and mining businesses that are headquartered in the country's capital city.

THE MODIFIED AIRBUS A321LR

The future of Air Astana's fleet rests on the Airbus A321LR. Today, the airline operates 11 of the type and has seven more on order. The airline plans to modify them by adding additional central fuel tanks (ACT) following the resuming of non-stop flights from London Heathrow (LHR) to Almaty, a route previously served with the now retired Boeing 757-200.

Peter Foster said that the airline aims to start flying the route in 2025 with four modified aircraft and to complete the refit of the fleet by the end

20 Nursultan Nazarbayev International Airport stands as the primary international airport serving Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

21 **22** **23** Air Astana has opened The Shanyrak, its first-ever business lounge at Almaty Airport, marking a major milestone in the airline's history. The lounge is exclusively available to Air Astana business class passengers and eligible Nomad Club loyalty members departing on the airline's international flights. // **AIR ASTANA**

of the year. The extra fuel tanks will be installed on the other seven jets on order, leased from Air Lease Corporation, which are expected to arrive in 2026.

With a maximum flight time of nine hours and 35 minutes of flight time, the London-Almaty service is among the longest narrow-body ones in the world. The modifications allow Air Astana to enhance operational flexibility while operating more long-range, non-stop flights. Air Astana plans to start a new route, Almaty to Frankfurt, June 1. It also expects to launch another, Almaty to Tokyo, in March 2026, following a signed codeshare agreement with Japan Airlines (JL).

Foster is proud of the fact that his airline's MRO in Astana is carrying out the modifications in-house, under the supervision and approval of Airbus and civil aviation authorities.

Air Astana's Airbus A321LRs are configured with 166 seats: 16 in Business Class and 150 in Economy. The 16 Recaro Business Class seats are fully

flat and staggered, similar to those found on such airlines as Aer Lingus (EI) and TAP Portugal (TP).

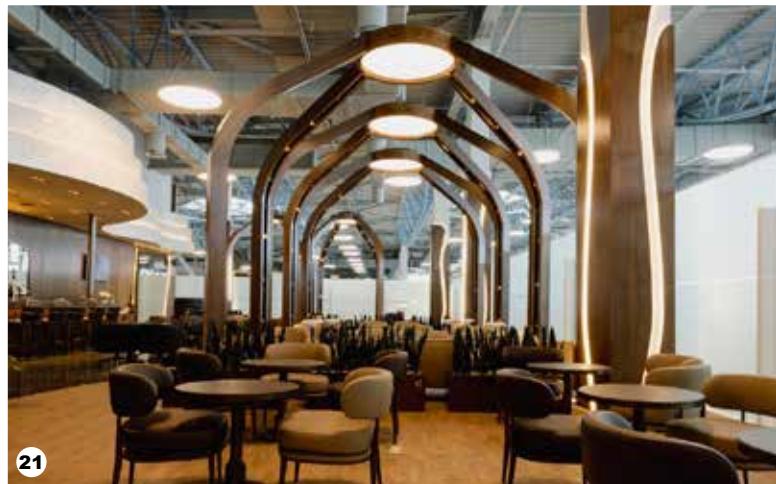
KC started 2025 with 57 aircraft in its fleet, including two additional Airbus A321ceos as it copes with the problems afflicting the Pratt & Whitney GTF engines that power the A321LRs.

"The OEMs keep blaming the global supply chain for everything that goes wrong," Foster said, sounding irked.

"Actually, we all have supply chains, do we not? In life, we all have supply chains. In our daily lives, we need our groceries and our car maintenance, and everything else. This tendency to hide behind supply chains is becoming increasingly irritating to the airline establishment."

The CEO also blasted Boeing over delays in delivering three Boeing 787-9s to be leased from Air Lease Corporation.

"In terms of the deliveries, what's going on with Boeing is very tragic," he said. "We're going



21

to keep the 767s until the end of 2028 because we don't know when the 787s are going to come. The last expected delivery time we were told was the end of 2025."

"What we're seeing with Boeing is almost like a slowly unfolding Greek tragedy," Foster said. "It just gets worse and worse and worse."

FLYARYSTAN SPREADS ITS WINGS

FlyArystan (FS) is the low-cost subsidiary of the Air Astana Group. This new airline received its IATA code in autumn 2024



20



and, since January 1, 2025, it has been marketing all of its flights under the FS code.

From a commercial point of view, Air Astana and FlyArystan operate independently, with Richard Ledger as the acting president. The group seems to follow the examples set by Qantas (QF) and Jetstar (JQ) and by Singapore Airlines (SQ) and Scoot (TR), sharing Pilots, engineers, and many other services. FlyArystan's success complements Air Astana's fuller services, enabling the group to diversify its customer base and stimulate air travel demand in Kazakhstan.

In November 2024, Air Astana's Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) unit reached a milestone by completing its first 12-year C-check on an Airbus A321. This capability, certified by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), reduces dependency on external facilities and lowers maintenance costs. To date, the airline has completed over 30 C-checks in-house.

The airline has also invested in training infrastructure. The Flight Training Center, opened in 2023 in Astana, features a full-flight simulator and

emergency training facilities. The intent is to ensure that Air Astana crews are trained to the highest international standards. The airline also partners with global aviation institutions for training programs.

Air Astana's evolution from a modest national carrier to a leading airline in Central Asia is a testament to its resilience and strategic vision. As it embraces fleet modernization with the Airbus A321LR and the Boeing 787, navigates geopolitical complexities, and leverages regional growth, the airline is becoming ever more central to Central Asian aviation. Its investments in ecosystem development, sustainability, and service excellence should ensure that it remains a competitive and innovative force in the global market for years to come.

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EMIRATES: WINGS OF CARBON

Story **SIMONE CHELLINI**
Photos **AUTHOR, UNLESS NOTED**



Carbon fiber is a truly remarkable material. Lighter than aluminum, it can withstand higher loads and contribute to significantly reduce weight. The material is being used more and more in aviation, slowly replacing aluminum and other heavier alloys. Some fuselages, like those of the A350 and the Boeing 787, are wholly made of carbon fiber.

But, in the Emirates' (EK) fleet, carbon fiber was missing. At least until now.

WITH THE INTRODUCTION of the first A350-900XWB, Emirates is properly integrating this magnificent material into its materials portfolio. At the 2019 Dubai Airshow, Emirates placed an order for 50 A350-900XWBs. At the time, the airline also had A330neos on order, which it replaced with additional A350s. Four years later, at the same airshow, the airline increased its A350 order to 65 units.

After years of successfully operating Airbus A330, A380 and Boeing 777, Emirates finally decided to maximize its presence in lower-demand markets. At the end of 2024, after a 16-year hiatus since its last type delivery, Emirates introduced its next-generation airliner, the Airbus A350.



❶ The event's attendance list included personalities from companies involved in the milestone, such as Airbus and Rolls-Royce, as well as regulators and media. The event was the perfect opportunity for Emirates to showcase its brand-new interiors on the upcoming A350s.

❷ During the event, many commemorative gifts were exchanged. Philippe Mhun, Executive Vice President of Programmes and Services at Airbus, gave a speech thanking Emirates for its continuous trust.

THE EVENT

Emirates took delivery of its first A350 on November 25, 2024. On the morning of November 27, after some delivery delays, the first A350-900XWB was ready to be presented to a crowd of journalists at Emirates' Engineering facilities in Dubai. That morning, I arrived on my first-ever A380 flight, and headed immediately to the venue. The ceremony started with a welcome speech by Sir Tim Clark, President of Emirates and arguably the most influential and charismatic figure in modern civil aviation. He addressed the members of the royal family and audience, welcoming the large crowd of employees, representatives, and media. Airbus's Philippe Mhun and Rolls-Royce's Oman Ali Adib spoke after him.

After a countdown, the hangar's doors opened to reveal the fuselage, A6-EXA, with DXB and Dubai's skyline in the background. Between the red carpet and the aircraft, a large billboard

displayed "FIRST A350". After the ceremonial pictures, the media were invited to get on top of a mini scissor-lift to take pictures of the aircraft from a privileged angle. As we reached the same height as the A350's tail, I noted how beautiful the Emirates' new livery looks on this aircraft. The restyled UAE flag shines on the wingtip and tail, bringing a refreshed touch to the airline's iconic livery. As we returned to ground level, it was the media's turn to board this brand-new aircraft.

ON BOARD

Our tour started in the cockpit: interestingly, this is the first cockpit in Emirates' commercial fleet to feature 'only' two thrust levers. The A350's cockpit has nose and tail cameras, which were active during our visit. To me, this still feels like a futuristic control station rather than a now widely adopted commercial aircraft cockpit. In the cabin, the first thing I noticed was the absence of a First Class. Between doors 1 and 2, Emirates



has installed a sizeable 32-seat Business Class. The seats are in a staggered 1-2-1 layout, as on the carrier's A380, and are inspired by the Mercedes S Class, the pinnacle of automotive luxury.

The seats are comfortable and spacious, with a much-improved design over the 2-3-2 layout of the 777-300(ER). Under Emirates' retrofitting plan, this configuration will soon be available on more aircraft. The seat design is almost identical to that of the new 777 one, with a few exceptions for some details in the color scheme. Warm wood tones surround the in-flight



5

entertainment screen, windows and table, creating a comfortable and cozy environment without looking opulent.

Each seat—which has direct aisle access, the famous minibar, and a tablet to control the new 4K QLED HD 20" IFE screen—would not be complete without its lie-flat reclining mode, multiple charging sockets, and wireless charging. At the back of the cabin, the airline has allocated a space for in-flight snacks between the last central row and the dividing partition. Overall, this is a state-of-the-art cabin, as

close as can be to perfection on a single-decker aircraft.

Still, some have complained about a missing detail: a privacy door. The truth is that the staggered configuration means that there simply is no need for one. Doors in Business Class are becoming more popular due to the often-false feeling that they significantly increase privacy. The drawback is that they can make the environment cramped and plasticky while solving a nonexistent necessity.

With only 21 seats, Premium Economy is the star of this cabin



4

forme. Arranged in a spacious 2-3-2 layout, this cabin—which may be the best Premium Economy one in the world—will be installed on all 65 units that Emirates has on order, and includes a 13.3" TV screen, footrest, adjustable headrest, generous reclines and much more. Thanks to its reduced size, the cabin feels private and cozy, and I am sure it will be a popular flight product. Last, but certainly not least, is the Economy Class cabin—in which most travelers will fly—where Emirates has installed 259 seats in a 3-3-3 layout. The seats have a new fabric in an elegant light blue with luxurious bronze-colored armrests, resulting in a very sophisticated look. Emirates will soon introduce a brand-new, six-way adjustable headrest to Economy Class on the A350, eliminating the need for neck pillows. As in Premium Economy, the IFE screen is 4K 13.3". Emirates has taken its already outstanding IFE offer to the next level, offering faster connectivity on board, 400

④ The Business Class cabin on the A350-900 features Emirates' latest seat iteration, with all-front facing seats arranged in a 1-2-1 layout. The iconic minibar remains, together with a separate tablet, to control the refreshed IFE screen. Recently, Emirates hinted at the possibility of a new cabin design for the Boeing 777X due to the ongoing delivery delays, which would allow the airline more time to design a new product.

⑤ The shiny A350 winglet with Dubai and DXB in the background. Like many airlines that have operated the A350 for years, the Emirates' new logo is painted on the winglet.



6

6 The staggered Business Class layout guarantees excellent privacy, making a sliding door almost redundant. The new, warm colour palette is also found around the windows, which, similarly to the Boeing 787, can be dimmed electronically.

7 The large glass cockpit features six displays conveying all the information as needed during different flight phases.

additional titles, and the fastest and sharpest screens in its fleet across all travel classes.

Overall, some modern design and functionality touches stand out, like an area for snacks in the rear of the galley, a water fountain, and stylish decorations around all windows. The inflight connectivity takes full advantage of ViaSat's Global Xpress (GX) satellite network, improving the service over that offered in the rest of the fleet.

However, what will truly make a difference in the short term is the aircraft itself, the A350-900.

NEXT-GENERATION FLEET

After the visit, some media members took part in a quick Q&A with Sir Tim Clark, with the questions being heavily focused on the airline's next-gen fleet.

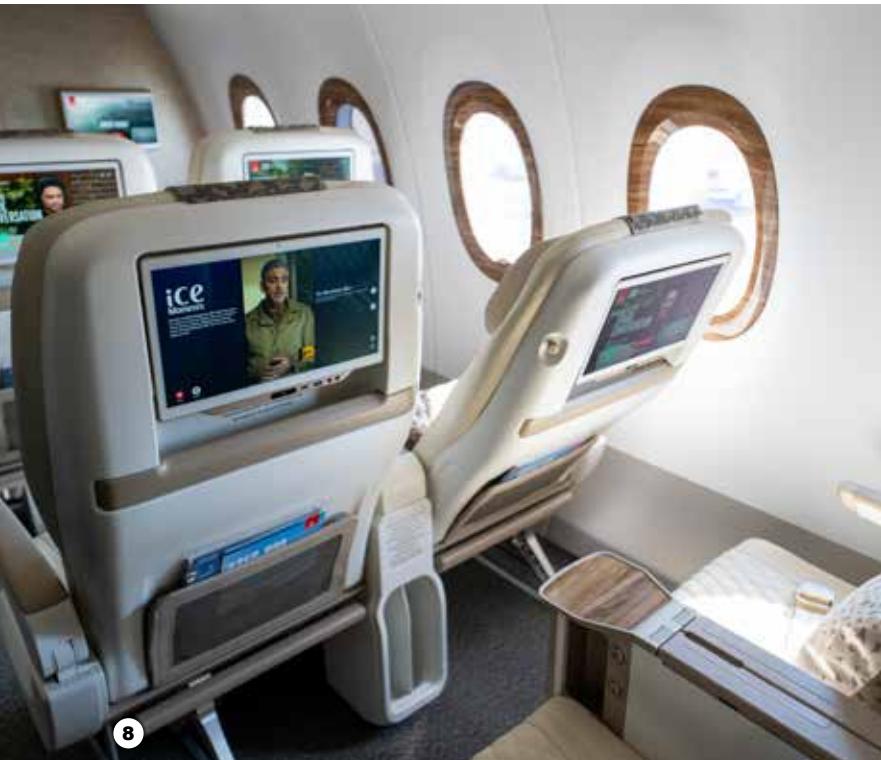
While Emirates has succeeded with the A350-900, the same



cannot be said for the larger Airbus flagship variant. Emirates has often expressed concerns with the Rolls-Royce Trent XWB-97 engine, the variant designated to exclusively power the A350-1000. Emirates' concerns concern the wing-on time, which it deems insufficient to successfully operate an A350-1000 fleet. However, Etihad

Airways (EY) and Qatar Airways (QR) use the type in similar environments and seem to be generally satisfied with both performance and reliability.

Doubts still surround the delivery of the first Boeing 787 to Emirates. The carrier plans to introduce the -8 and -10 variants of the Dreamliner to



its fleet, while flydubai (FZ) will exclusively fly the -9. When asked about the delivery and introduction timeline, Clark directly replied, "No idea." Such frankness is rare in the aviation industry, where C-suite personalities often sugarcoat certain topics to project a secure image. In this case, Emirates did not hold back on its disappointment with the Dreamliner and the Boeing 777X.

Emirates is the largest customer of the new Triple Seven variant, with 205 orders for both the -8 and -9 types. To put these numbers in perspective, the airline accounts for around 40% of Boeing's backlog for the type. Once again, without hiding his disappointment, Clark said that the airline should be flying "over 80 units" by the time of the A350 presentation. The latest certification and delivery delays have forced Emirates to fly its A380s longer than anticipated,

forcing it to invest in cost-intensive retrofitting programs.

EXCLUSIVELY WIDE-BODY

Of the carrier's 65 A350-900 on order, 15 will feature a 'medium-haul' cabin, like the airline's first A6-EXA. The remaining 50 will be delivered with a crew rest area and one additional seat row in Premium Economy. These aircraft will be used on long-haul to ultra-long-haul missions, potentially serving every corner of the globe from Dubai.

For decades, Emirates has operated large twin-aisle aircraft on flights as short as one hour to destinations like Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. These flights have always provided the airline with high capacity, often at the cost of sacrificing the number of daily frequencies.

The new 'medium-haul' A350 carries 312 passengers in a three-

class configuration, just a dozen fewer than those in the newest four-class Boeing 777-300(ER). However, the A350 will enable the airline to cut its fuel costs by factors large enough to justify new routes and to increase the profit margin in some existing low-density ones.

Operating an all-wide-body fleet poses challenges. Emirates has solved some of these by partnering with Flydubai. The Dubai-based carrier, founded in 2008, has quickly built a successful international network that complements that of Emirates. The code sharing between the two carriers has worked well for years: Flydubai passengers share part of the experience with Emirates, and vice versa.

Both Emirates and Flydubai are rethinking their fleets and business models. Recently, Flydubai changed the single-

8 9 The star of the cabin is however the new Premium Economy product, which features a generous recline and similar padding and comfort levels than in Business Class, albeit not reclining into a lie-flat bed. The increasing demand for Premium Economy travel motivated Emirates to install this cabin on all its A350 fleet, which will include 65 units.

type nature of its fleet by ordering 30 Boeing 787-9 at the 2023 Dubai Airshow, celebrating its 100 million passengers. The airline is also setting up a dedicated Premium check-in and lounge experience in DXB.

Through its exclusive use of A380s and 777s, Emirates has succeeded in guaranteeing high consistency across its fleet. However, a 777-300(ER), let alone an A380, may overserve the airline's capacity to destinations such as Bologna (BLQ) in Italy. That is why Emirates has opted to include comparatively smaller and more fuel-efficient airliners in its future fleet.

The airline is arguably the only one in the world to have mastered the use of the super jumbo. To Emirates, the A380 is more than a loyal workhorse; the aircraft symbolizes EK's global success. Many airlines failed to operate the type, and just a few have recently resumed A380 operations. The A380 has enabled Emirates to thrive and become one of global aviation's icons—if not the global aviation icon. On multiple occasions, the airline has expressed interest in an A380 successor, but has not convinced the manufacturer to provide it with a close replacement.

MIDDLE EAST: AIRLINES VS OEMS

In recent years, the tensions between Middle Eastern carriers and OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) have become a recurring topic. A few years ago, we saw Qatar Airways and Airbus fighting over the A350's paint, with QR arguing that poor paint quality was posing a safety risk, and consequently grounding part of its fleet. The tension escalated into a legal



10 The economy class product has also been revamped and features a generous 32" of pitch and 6" of recline. The seats will soon see the introduction of a new 6-way adjustable headrest.



battle, with Doha's giant seeking compensation. In response, Airbus cancelled its remaining deliveries to Qatar Airways. Luckily, this tale ended with QR's resumption of A350 operations in early 2024.

In the summer of 2024, flydubai complained about the impact of Boeing's delivery delays. The carrier did not receive any planned Boeing 737 MAX in the second half of 2024, which challenged its network

expansion and delayed its new cabin products.

Around the same time, Emirates got into a tussle with Rolls-Royce. Sir Tim Clark made no concessions in regard to the A350-1000 engines. He expressed his concerns about on-wing time and, as of February 2025, refused to order the type until Rolls-Royce improved the design.

Also, Clark repeatedly pointed his finger at Airbus and



12

Boeing, blaming the OEMs for contributing to supply chain delays. He often expressed his disappointment with the ongoing Boeing 777X delays.

A NEW MEGA-HUB

With a new airport just a few years away, Emirates is poised to thrive like never before. The congestion issues occasionally faced by the airline during peak hours in Dubai will be a thing of the past, and smaller twin- and single-aisle aircraft will serve the new Al Maktoum International Airport hub. The A350 fits perfectly into this new business model, which will enable Emirates to operate more non-stop flights from Dubai to regional and ULR destinations. Increasing regional competition is challenging Dubai's position as the world's top hub. The rapid expansion of Etihad Airways' fleet and network has resulted in the A380 making a comeback in 2024, and Qatar Airways, just one hour away, is an always



13

threatening presence. More competition from Riyadh Air (RX) is projected in the upcoming years. Other airlines in the region, like Gulf Air (GF) and Oman Air (WY), do not pose a serious threat to Emirates and focus on being boutique airlines.

However, more competition will soon come from the Indian subcontinent. In 2023, Air India (AI) and Indigo (I9) went on a crazy shopping spree, ordering

over 1,000 narrow- and wide-body aircraft to serve the most populous country on earth. Thanks to their hub models and because of a lack of serious competition by the Indian carriers, and despite traffic limitations, Middle Eastern carriers have so far dominated the India-Europe market.

As this scenario rapidly evolves, the A350 will be a key player in granting Emirates the flexibility it needs. 

⑫ Dubai is the global aviation mega-hub. Here, the first morning rush hour depicts Emirates success as a global carrier.

⑬ The lack of a true replacement for the Airbus A380 has motivated Emirates to request a new, upgraded version. So far, the airline's requests have not been met by Airbus; the European manufacturer is focusing on twin-engine aircraft with the highest capacity provided by the A350-1000.





AIR FRANCE SUITES

Story & Photos
JOHN HUSTON

I stepped into Air France's (AF) Business Class suite, one of the new ones with doors for greater privacy, and... wow!

The cabin, in white, black, and blue, looks terrific. My 9A suite was very spacious and pretty. A pillow, a blanket, and sleepers were on the seat, and a bottle of Evian and headphones were in a small closet to the left of the seat, with doors decorated with the Winged Seahorse, Air France's historical logo.

① The Hippocampus was introduced as Air France's logo in 1933 and remained on the fuselage of the airline's aircraft until 1976. Here it adorns the door of the closet which is part of the Business Suites introduced a couple of years ago on the Airbus A350-900 and part of the Boeing 777-300ER fleets.



❷ The access to the Air France Salons (lounges) at Paris Charles De Gaulle airport is through automatic gates. Passengers simply scan their boarding pass to get in.

❸ The Air France Salon at Terminal 2E is huge and magnificently decorated. Yet the food and drink options were quite average. Champagne apart, of course....

❹ Boeing 777-300ER F-GZNT is one of the twelve Air France Triple Sevens sporting the new Business Class suites. These aircraft do not feature Air France's top-notch onboard product, La Premiere First Class.

❺ There are 48 suites onboard: 28 are between doors 1 and 2, with the remaining 20 in a separate cabin just aft door 2. The most innovative feature of the suites is the sliding door, allowing the maximum of privacy, particularly during night flights like the one to and from Johannesburg.

❻ For several years, flights AF 990/991 have been operated by the mighty Airbus A380. Air France had 10 Superjumbos in its fleet, but got rid of them at the beginning of 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit.



THE DOORS ARE the latest trend in premium cabins, and Air France decided to join British Airways (BA), Virgin Atlantic (VS), and Cathay Pacific (CX) in offering such an upscale product.

The suites debuted in the summer of 2023 and, as of today, are installed in 12 of Air France's Boeing 777-300ERs. These aircraft come in a three-class configuration with 48 seats in Business, 48 in Premium Economy, and 273 in Economy. All the cabins (not only the Business Class) are totally new in terms of décor and seats, to the point that AF decided to dub its 'middle class' 'Premium', not 'Premium Economy'.

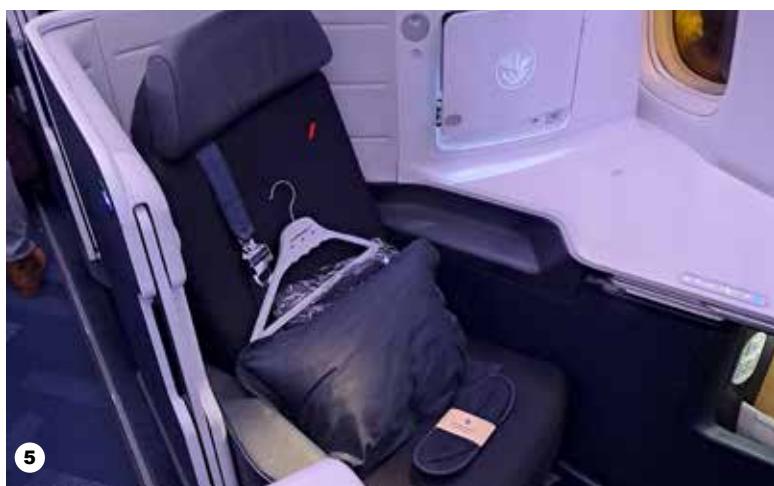
While planning a trip to South Africa and surfing the web in search of the best way to reach Johannesburg from my hometown of Milan, I found out that the daily Air France service connecting Paris Charles De Gaulle (CDG) to Johannesburg OR Tambo (JNB), once operated



by the mighty Airbus A380, now uses one of the refurbished Boeing 777-300ERs. The price for the return flight (actually, also the one for the one-way) was too steep for my finances but, having a rather remarkable number of Flying Blue points, I decided to try Air France's new Business Class Suites on my trip out.

My journey to South Africa started on a late November

afternoon with a flight from Milan Malpensa (MXP) to CDG on Air France's subsidiary Hop, which flies a fleet of Embraer regional jets. The peculiarity of Hop is that, in CDG, it uses the unacknowledged Terminal G, which is positioned at the easternmost end of the airport. The transfer from there to the main terminals (1 and 2) is a journey within the journey: once disembarked, Hop's passengers



reach the tiny terminal building on foot and then walk some 500yd (460m) to catch the shuttle bus for a nine-minute trip to Terminal 2F, which Air France uses for its intra-Schengen flights.

Once I had arrived there, I made my way to Terminal 2E, passing immigration (luckily, I was spared security) and then walked some 10 more minutes to reach the L gates, as Flight AF990 (operated by F-GZNT, a nine-year-old Boeing 777-328ER) would be boarding from Gate 44L. At the end of my long trek through the airport, I reached the Air France Salon (lounge) some 45 minutes after my flight from Milan had landed. My reward was the Salon itself, which I can only describe as extraordinary in size (it's huge), decor, and amenities. Yet, the array of food—salads, cheeses, cold cuts, a soup, and a couple more hot options—was average. Still, the Champagne, which was available at three different self-serve bars, compensated for whatever was lacking in food.

Before moving to the gate, I refreshed in one of the pretty shower rooms furnished with Clarins products. My first shower in an airline lounge was so nice and long that I reached gate 44L when boarding was in full swing. My Sky Priority was useless, as the agents had already opened the lane dedicated to Economy passengers. As a result, boarding was not the exclusive and quick procedure a Business Class ticket should guarantee.



7 The closet to the left of the seat features a mirror and contains the remote control of the IFE, noise-insulating headphones and a bottle of Evian water.

8 The eight suites in rows 1 and 9, immediately behind the bulkheads, are much more spacious than the others, particularly in the legs and feet area.

9 The remote control of the IFE has a small display indicating the route and the time of the day at the point of departure.

I also had to queue in the jet bridge because Air France's Business Class is split into two cabins: one between Doors 1 and 2, with eight rows (1-2-1) for 32 seats, and the other (four more rows for 16 seats) past Door 2, which you reach by the same lane used by Premium Economy and Economy passengers. When checking in online, 30 hours before, I had opted for that second cabin to select seat 9A. Why? Because, being immediately behind the bulkheads, the suites in rows 1 and 9 have three times the space for legs and feet (when the seat is in the bed position) than the others.

Air France is among those airlines to have introduced the obscene practice of making Business Class passengers pay if they want to select a specific seat onboard before check-in. Specifically, the asking price for the suites in rows 1 and 9 was €199 (US\$207). People wealthier than me had booked the four suites in row 1 weeks before the flight, but those in row 9 remained un-selected until check-in. When an email alerted me to check in on the day before





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departure, I was fast enough to get one of them and, even better, a solo suite near the window.

As I explored my surroundings, I found out that, besides the small closet to the left of the seat, there was a small compartment to the left of my feet. I could store a book and a smartphone there. A universal AC plug, the dining table, and the electric controls of the seat were in the console between me and the cabin windows. The remote control of the IFE screen was inside the closet, near the headphones, and a USB-C plug

was just below it. A reading light was above my left shoulder. The armrest on my right-hand side could be lowered and made level with the seat cushion, resulting in a larger bed surface at night. The door of the suite closed automatically by pushing a button but needed to be opened manually by pulling a small handle.

The new Air France suites incorporate two cool pieces of technology: a Bluetooth connection to the Inflight Entertainment System, which enables passengers to watch

movies or listen to music using their own headphones, and a wireless smartphone recharge system. Once at cruise altitude, I tested them both, only to discover they weren't working, at least not with my devices: the Bluetooth option of the IFE said it could 'not find' my Bing headphones, and there was no way to recharge my Samsung phone wirelessly, even when a Flight Attendant came by to help me with that.

While we were still on the ground, cabin service started with a welcome drink (I went with the Tradition 1ER Cru De Saint-Gall Champagne). Then, the dinner menu, a hot towel, and an amenity kit were distributed. The latter was pretty on the outside but somewhat disappointing, as it contained only the essentials: socks, earplugs, an eye mask, a dental kit, and a couple of Clarins lotions for hands and faces.

We pushed back from the gate at 21:15, some 15 minutes behind schedule. After a long taxi to Runway 26L, we were airborne at 21:30, heading south toward the Mediterranean Sea and

10 The Inflight Entertainment System (IFE) screen, measuring 17.3", is rather diminutive, if compared to those featured by other airlines' Business Class suites

11 An aperitif was served after takeoff from CDG. In its Business Class cabin, Air France serves Tradition 1ER Cru de Saint-Gall Champagne

12 The three-courses dinner was delicious and very abundant. Traveling with Air France, Business Class passengers have the possibility to pre-select their lunch or dinner main course until when they check-in online.

Algeria. Our route would take us over Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, the Gulf of Guinea, Angola, Namibia, and Botswana before entering South African airspace almost 11 hours later.

While we were still climbing, an aperitif was served: a glass of Champagne (my choice) or water accompanied by a box of cheese mini-crepes, which proved tasteless and gummy. Where were the famous and delicious mixed nuts (a classic of Business Class aperitifs)?

Shortly after, I opened the food and beverage menu, which was grand in size but less so in content, particularly on the food side. What surprised me most was the absence of alternatives for the starters. The only option was a combo of bulgur wheat, apricot and hazelnut salad, and a small plate of shrimp and sweet potato cream. We could pick from four main courses: pork loin cooked in honey and soy sauce accompanied by potato puree and onion compote; Guinea fowl with mustard sauce, green lentils, and baby spinach; cod with cauliflower puree and grilled buckwheat with horseradish sauce on the side; or a vegetarian plate with sweet potato, peanut and ginger mousseline, orzo, roasted butternut squash, and grilled chickpeas. Afterward, we could indulge in a plate of mixed cheeses, dessert, or sorbets.

I went with the fish, which was delicious, particularly with the horseradish sauce. After that, I could not resist the cheese platter (which did not include the dried fruits or confitures one would expect). I declined the dessert (a coconut, lime, and mango slice) but refreshed my mouth with a strawberry sorbet.



⑬ The cod with cauliflower puree and grilled buckwheat with horseradish sauce on the side was not very beautiful to the eye, but very good to the palate

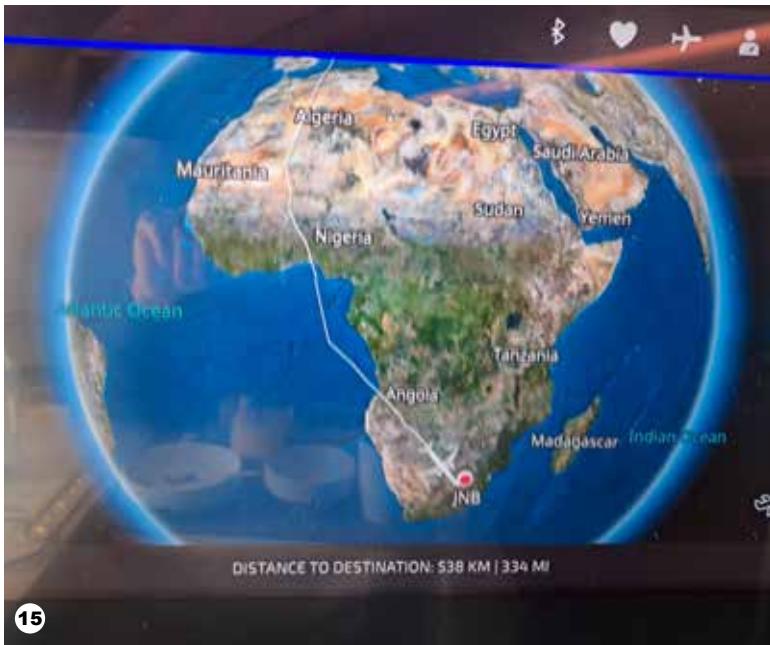
⑭ The meal was rounded up by a choice bwtween a cheese platter, fruit, a dessert or a variety of mini sorbets. But you could have them all, if you wished.



I decided on a couple of glasses of Chateau de Villemajou Languedoc white (the other option was a white Bourgogne). The portions were abundant (as always on Air France), and the Cabin Attendants executed the service to perfection, timing things right, step by step, resulting in a very pleasant dining experience. Were I to find something to criticize, I would say that the dinner table, while intended to allow passengers to step away from their seats

during the meal service, was a little bit too small, to the point that not even a fork could be placed outside the dinner tray.

Shortly after, as we were entering the third hour of the flight, the cabin lights were dimmed in preparation for the night, and I explored the inflight entertainment system. At 17.3", the 4K HD touch-screen display was a bit small, not only compared to the those of other airlines' new Business Classes but



15

also for the size of the suite and its distance from the seat. Contents were plentiful: 247 movies (including 47 'new releases'), dozens of music compilations and albums, cartoons, games, and animated maps.

Before preparing for sleep, I closed my suite door, a first for me in Business Class during a night flight (a few years before, I had enjoyed Qatar Airways' QSuite, but on a daylight flight). Once in the lie-flat position, I enjoyed the ample room for my feet and legs—like that of a proper, single bed. The seat-bed itself was not very large, but it was soft and enabled me to lay

15 The course of flight AF990 followed a rather 'western' route, taking the Triple Seven over the Gulf of Guinea rather than overflying equatorial Africa.

16 Breakfast was served one hour before landing, to maximize passengers' sleep. It was a demonstration of professionalism and coordination by the cabin crew, who performed service and cleaned up the cabin in less than 30 minutes



16



17

17 Blue skies and Austral summer temperatures welcomed flight AF990 at its arrival in Johannesburg

18 In 2024, Johannesburg O.R Tambo International Airport handled 17,852,569 passengers, or 4% more than in 2023



18

on both sizes, with quite enough space for my arms.

My sleep was interrupted twice: first when the FA came to buckle me to the seat during turbulence, and then when a doctor was called because of an onboard medical emergency. Still, an hour before landing and while we were overflying Botswana's dry, flat plains, I woke up decently rested and ready for breakfast, which was as generous as the dinner I had enjoyed just a few hours before.

After covering my table with white linen, the cabin attendants delivered a cheese omelet accompanied by stewed mixed vegetables, a plate of plain yogurt, bread, butter, and marmalade, a pastry, a bowl of orange and pink grapefruit, a glass of orange juice, and a cup of black tea with milk and sugar.

When I had finished, the IFE map indicated 30 minutes to arrival. The Captain announced we had started our descent into JNB, and the FA began preparing the cabin for landing. I visited the loo located just aft of the cockpit and discovered it was twice as large as the one nearer my seat, just aft Door 2. This is probably because the ones toward the front were the only Business Class toilets before the cabin was upgraded.

Back in my seat, I enjoyed the views of the approaching terrain, the sun, and the blue sky, which always stuns those who arrive at a tropical destination or into a southern hemisphere city from the northern hemisphere winter. A few turns over the surroundings of Johannesburg took us to landing on runway 03R, followed by a long taxi (due to the size of OR Tambo Airport)

and stopping in front of the international terminal building to the right of a South African Airways' A330-300s.

JNB is one of the rare airports to feature a fast lane for premium passengers at arrivals, so immigration was a breeze. A mere 10 minutes after disembarking, I was at carousel number 2 to retrieve my suitcase.

At the end of an 11-hour flight, Air France confirmed once again its commitment to spotless service and fine dining. The suite was a step forward over AF's previous best product in Business Class, save minor glitches like the size of the dining table and the IFE screen and, at 19.7 inches (according to aerolopa.com), the seat being narrow for this class.

Yet, all in all, *magnifique!* ☺

19 The plains of southern Botswana as seen from seat 9A, while descending into Johannesburg OR Tambo Airport. The sheer size of the General Electric GE90 engine is really impressive, from this perspective



THE CENTERFOLD



THE CENTERFOLD



SHYAM VIMALKUMAR - MXP

UK PASSENGER 757S BOW OUT

A FOND 42 YEAR CHAPTER DRAWS TO A CLOSE

Story and Photos
AIRWAYS



1 Boarding Jet2 Boeing 757-21B G-LSAI, at the time, the oldest flying passenger 757 in the world, at 37.3 Years Old.





2

❷ Jet2 Boeing 757-21B G-LSAI taxis to depart Geneva, for Manchester as LS812. The final UK passenger 757 flight.

❸ Manchester Airport's state-of-the-art Terminal 2 check in area

❹ Gate B9, displaying flight LS811 to Geneva, the final uk outbound 757 departure

BRITISH AIRLINES have had a fond history with the Boeing 757—the Seattle rocket, the flying pencil. By any nickname, the much-loved twinjet has stood the test of time.

But, after 42 years, that chapter has closed. Jet2 (LS), the last UK airline to operate the 757 in passenger service in the United Kingdom, retired the type in January. The last weekend of flights took place on January 4 with a round trip from Manchester (MAN) to Antalya (AYT) in Türkiye and one round trip to Geneva (GVA), which would repeat the next day and mark the end of the passenger operations of the 757.

I was extremely lucky to get a seat on the last-ever departure from UK soil onboard a UK airline 757.

A LOOK BACK

In 1983, British Airways (BA) and Eastern Air Lines (EA) were launch customers for the Boeing 757, which soon became a mainstay of UK aviation. Legacy, holiday, and charter airlines alike all operated 757 fleets. At one point, British Airways (BA) had well over 50 of the type in service. Air 2000 (DP) and Britannia Airways, both now part of TUI Airways (BY), were also major 757 operators in the UK until 2021. Titan Airways

(ZT) depended heavily on the 757 for its charter operations for years, until retiring the type in 2023, replacing it with the Airbus A321LR. Long-gone British iconic operators such as Astraeus (5W), Thomas Cook (MT), and Monarch (ZB) also had sizeable 757 fleets. According to industry sources, UK passenger 757s have flown over 471 million passengers, with 232 different 757s being registered within the UK over the last 42 years.

JET2 AND THE BOEING 757

Jet2 traces its origins back to Channex Express in the 1970s. In 2003, Jet2 was established utilizing Boeing 737-300s (seven

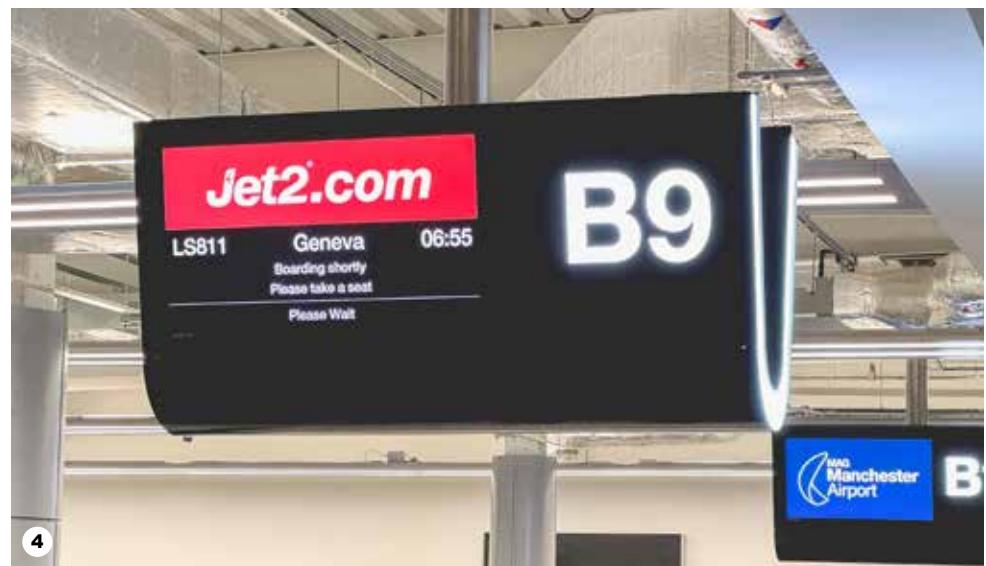
of which remain in service as of this writing). With the need to expand, Jet2 began to acquire Boeing 757-200s in 2005.

Their first 757 (G-LSAA) joined the fleet in 2005, shortly followed by G-LSAB. Between 2005 and 2008, G-LSAA through to G-LSAJ joined the fleet. G-LSAF was in the fleet for the brief months between October 2006 and January 2007. G-LSAK joined after a brief lease to UAE carrier RAK Airways. G-LSAL & M, leased from US carrier Allegiant (G4), joined between March 2011 and October 2012, both configured with 229 seats. All of Jet2's 757s were configured with 235 seats.

Jet2's main 757 hubs were Manchester and Leeds Bradford. For some years, Jet2 also based 757s at Glasgow and Newcastle.

Over the years, Jet2's 757 fleet peaked at between 12 and 15 examples during the summer seasons, including summer leases from Titan Airways (G-POWH) in 2018 and Privilege Style (EC-ISY) in 2015. In 2008, Jet2 began flying its 757s across the Atlantic on seasonal charters to New York Newark from Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, and Leeds. The routes flourished until the COVID-19 pandemic, after which they were not resumed.

The beginning of the end of Jet2's 757s came in October 2019, when the airline retired G-LSAG. At the start of the pandemic, Jet2 shed G-LSAD and G-LSAH. The three planes have since been scrapped at Kemble Cotswold Airport. With many airlines retiring older types prematurely during the pandemic, there was speculation in the industry that the 757s could disappear like the 747s did. That did not quite happen; many airlines, apart



from American Airlines, retained them, showing just how well the 757 design had stood up over the years. Jet2 did acquire one additional 757 in 2023 (G-LSAO), but used it only for spare parts, scrapping it at Cotswold in 2024.

Jet2 sealed the fate of its remaining eight 757s in 2021, when it shocked the industry by switching to Airbus, having hitherto been an all-Boeing operator. In 2021, Jet2 ordered

36 A321neos with 35 options. In 2022, it ordered 35 A320neos. In 2024, it increased the order to 146 A321neos, exercised all its options, and converted its A320neos on order into A321neos. The first (G-SUNB) arrived in March 2023, configured with 232 seats.

By 2024, it was clear that Jet2's 757s were in their twilight. Jet2 started the year with seven Boeing 757-200s, and steadily whittled the number to just two

5 Despite their age, Jet2 retrofitted all their 757s with glass cockpits.

6 A snow covered Manchester Airport, during a rare snowstorm

by the time of the final flights. G-LSAK, their youngest 757, and G-LSAI, their oldest, were all that remained.

THE FINAL FLIGHTS

The day of the final 757 flights got off to an interesting

start. A heavy snowstorm was beginning to hit Manchester and, by the time I had gone through security, the airport was covered with thick snow. For most of its flights, Jet2 uses Manchester's Terminal 2, the first product of Manchester's 10-year expansion plan. Compared

to the others, this terminal is a breeze to pass through and very state-of-the-art.

At the gate, the flight looked busy, with flight number LS811 displayed on the board and turned out, it was just about sold out as well. Most were normal passengers, but there was a good contingent of avgeeks, all jumping at the chance to be a part of history. Luckily for us, the 757 was parked on a remote stand, entailing a drive across the airport, which was completely white and at least a foot (30cm) deep in snow. It's always a treat to board via a remote stand, and the snowstorm provided extra photo opportunities. All the boarding avgeeks stopped to take many snaps in the heavy snow, as

Despite some technical issues the previous day, the aircraft operating Jet2's final





757 flights was G-LSAI, 37 years old and the 150th 757 to roll off the production line. At the time of the flight, it was the oldest passenger 757 in the world. It had first flown in October 1987, before being

delivered, that November, to Chinese carrier CAAC Airlines (which, the following year, became China Southern [CZ]). Jet2 had later acquired sisterships G-LSAG and G-LSAH from China Southern,

in 2006. G-LSAI had since remained with Jet2.

I was seated in 9A, which offered a great view of the Rolls Royce RB211s. These engines, which have powered all of Jet2's 757s over the last 20 years, are arguably the best British export.

A wave of buses soon brought all the passengers onboard. However, the flight crew announced that the flight would be delayed for at least three hours until 09:00, when the airport was supposed to reopen, with the storm easing. Avgeeks and normal passengers alike embraced the time on the ground. It wasn't ideal, but everyone made the most of it, creating an upbeat atmosphere throughout.

The flight crew said that, to pass the time, any passengers wishing

7 Jet2's slim line seats, Jet2 757s had the capacity for 235 passengers.

8 A nod to G-LSAI's origins. Jet2 had not made any changes to the overhead area. The seat belt and no smoking signs were still in both English and Chinese.

to visit the flight deck could do so. There was also a subtle acknowledgement that this would be one of the final 757 flights. Pretty much all the window seats, which were clearly occupied by avgeeks, dinged with the call bells lit up throughout the cabin from people wanting the flight deck view. I had to wait 30 to 40 minutes for my turn but, at this moment, I noticed a small detail that showed G-LSAI's history. Jet2 had not made any changes

to the overhead area, so the seat belt and no smoking signs were still in both English and Chinese. The flight crew operating the last flights consisted of two very senior Jet2 Pilots, Charlie Collier and David Rix. Charlie was flying this leg to Geneva, while David would be flying the return to Manchester LS812, the final-ever Jet2 and UK passenger 757 flight. The cabin crew was also very senior, having worked for Jet2 for a number of years.

Despite the aircraft's age, Jet2 had retrofitted all its 757s with glass cockpits. During my brief time in the cockpit, I asked the flight crew two questions. Would they miss flying the 757? The answer was yes, it's a Pilot's airplane, but they were looking forward to the new challenge of transitioning to the A321neo.

Midway through the delay, the cabin crew began a brief service of drinks and snacks. I got a can of Pepsi Max and some shortbread. Not long after this service, the snow ploughs started speedily clearing the airport and we were one of the first flights to get de-iced. Shortly after, the cockpit visits ceased. Most of us had got the opportunity to visit, while the rest did so after landing in Geneva.

The expected flight time to Geneva was one hour and 30 minutes. As the plane had been de-iced, the takeoff had to be at maximum power thrust set as per the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The throttles held for a good 20 and 30 seconds before applying maximum TOGA. We were up like a rocket before the Manchester Viewing Park, and the sound from the two RB211s was simply incredible. I was thrown back into my seat a little. It was definitely one of the fastest and most powerful takeoffs I've ever experienced.

The Pilots were making the most of the final revenue flights, treating the avgeeks onboard. Even the everyday passengers were starting to get the hint that this flight was a bit more significant than average. During the safety demonstration, the name drop of the '757 Luxury Liner' provided a good clue. Before long, we were at a cruising



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9 TUI Airways Boeing 787-8 G-TUIE, parked on a remote stand, covered in snow.

10 I was seated in 9A, which offered a great view of the Rolls Royce RB211s. These engines, which have powered all of Jet2's 757s.

11 Passing above the clouds, after a rocket departure from Manchester

12 Cabin overview, the flight was just about sold out





13



14

13 Passing over the Alps

14 The snow-covered Alps in the distance on final approach

15 A somber moment, deboarding a UK 757 for the last time

16 Geneva was a lot warmer than Manchester, with clear blue skies.

altitude of 35,000ft, clearing the clouds over the UK. It was clear skies all the way down to Geneva.

I forgot that I had pre-ordered a cheese and ham grilled sandwich. It tasted great, and I washed it down with a Starbucks coffee, which Jet2 also sells onboard. Jet2 offers quite an extensive pre-order meal service on their flights. It was part of a discount bundle: 10% off both seat selection and meal pre-order, then 20% discount if you added a checked-in bag to that when booking a flight. Choices were surprisingly varied, and included an all-day breakfast, penne bolognaise pasta, chicken tikka masala, and peri peri chicken.

The descent over the snow-covered Alps was incredible, showcasing how stunning this part of the world is. After a smooth approach and landing onto Runway 22, a five-minute taxi ride took us to a remote stand at the other side of the airport. Geneva was a lot warmer than Manchester, with clear blue skies.

It was a somber moment for me, deboarding a UK 757 for the last time, as the return to Manchester, LS812, was going to bring the 42-year chapter to a close. Sitting on the flight next to me was an older couple, Trevor and Mary Matthews. G-LSAI was also their favorite 757. They had to rush through Geneva Airport to

get the bus from the terminal again, back onto the plane. I found out a few days later that they had just made it onto the final flight. This was a great little story, and they deserve a mention for their dedication, for doing both flights, and also being great company. It was quite fitting that they got to fly on their favorite Jet2 757 one last time.

THE FINAL FERRY FLIGHTS

Although retired at the end of 2024, G-LSAE wasn't ferried to MOD St. Athan for part out until January 2. G-LSAK was ferried out on January 6, and the oldest 757 remained until the very end. Jet2 had originally planned a flypast at both Leeds and Manchester before ferrying G-LSAI down to St. Athan. However, due to the adverse weather conditions that were still hitting England, these plans were scrapped. Instead, G-LSAI taxied around the entirety of Manchester Airport, including passing the viewing park, before departing at 11:50. After a 35-minute ferry flight, G-LSAI touched down for the final time in St Athan at 12:25, bringing an end to 20 years of 757s at Jet2 and 42 years of UK airline passenger 757 operations.

As of this writing, all Jet2 757s have been scrapped, apart from G-LSAI, which is currently listed as stored.



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A MEMORY TO CHERISH

Overall, it was a somber, yet historic moment. I will treasure the opportunity to have flown on one of the final flights, as the 757 is my favorite aircraft type. Despite the weather and technical challenges, the crew was exceptional and made the flight a great experience. They were professional and upbeat, keeping spirits high. The takeoff was incredible, and the views of the snow-covered Alps were stunning.

Even though there will be no more UK passenger 757s, the type will remain a common sight at UK airports for years to come. United Airlines (UA) still operates four daily 757 flights to America from Edinburgh during the summer. Icelandair (FI) has 11 757-200s in service, operating them regularly to the UK. They have recently stated that they plan to retire them in 2027, although that may be subject to change. There is also Delta (DL), which very occasionally flies its 757s to the UK and Europe and still has well over 100 in active service. Plenty of 757s have gone on to become freighters, with DHL operating its own across the UK. Some are even former British Airways aircraft.

UK passenger airlines may have retired their last 757s, but the type will be around for the years to come and for the enjoyment of those who are aviation enthusiasts at heart. 

AIRWAYS SPECIAL







The image shows the nose and wing of a white Ozark Airlines propeller aircraft. The tail section features black horizontal stripes and the word "OZARK" above the registration "N144D". Several passengers are visible on the tarmac near the plane, including a woman in a pink dress carrying a suitcase and a man in a dark suit. The background is a clear blue sky.

OZARK AIRLINES

PART ONE

Story **DAVID H. STRINGER**
Photos **AS NOTED**



OZARK AIR LINES was born on a late spring day in 1943 in downtown St. Louis. Four men assembled at the law office of Barak T. Mattingly, in the Title Guarantee Building at 706 Chestnut Street, to discuss the possibility of forming an intra-state airline that would operate between Springfield, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Columbia.

Besides Mattingly, the others in attendance were attorney Arthur G. Heyne, Floyd W. Jones, who was a bus company owner from Springfield, Missouri, and Homer Dale Hamilton, known simply as 'Laddie'. It was Laddie Hamilton's dream of starting an airline that these four men were there to discuss.

Articles of Incorporation were filed with the Missouri Secretary of State on August 26, 1943, and a charter was granted on September 1. Ozark Airlines was officially in business (note that "Airlines" was one word in the original incarnation of Ozark). Ozark was formed with the intent of eventually starting one of the new feeder airlines that the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) was discussing. These were airlines that would serve smaller cities and bring passengers to bigger airports where they would be "fed" to the trunk airlines which would speed them on their way to their final destination.

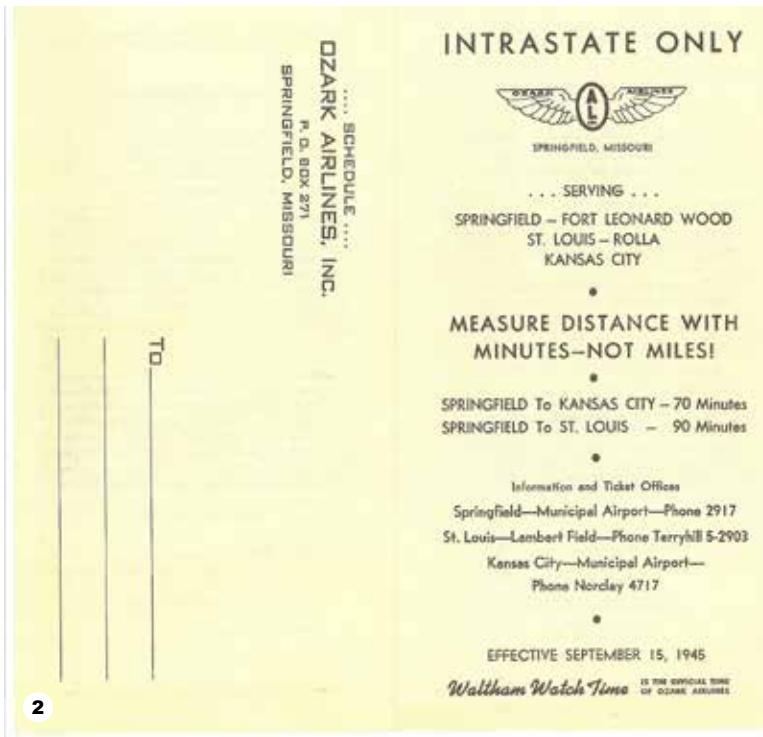
Starting out by flying totally within Missouri, where only the state's permission was needed

① Ozark was one of America's 13 local service airlines of the 1950s and '60s. This photo, taken at an unidentified location, shows the company doing what all of the local airlines did: serving passengers bound to and from America's small cities. Note the wheel well doors on this DC-3, part of an upgrade program completed in 1957. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

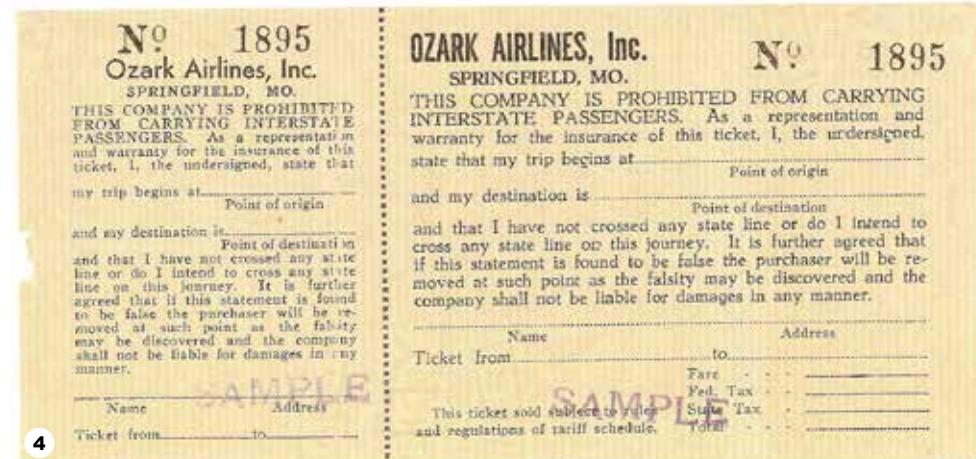
❷ September 15, 1945 timetable from Ozark's intrastate operation within Missouri. // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION

❸ Two Cessna T-50 Bobcats served with Ozark during the final months of intrastate operation. // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION

❹ To ensure the CAB knew that Ozark was playing by the intrastate rules, the company required customers bound for St. Louis or Kansas City to sign an affidavit that they did not intend to travel beyond those cities. // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION



❻



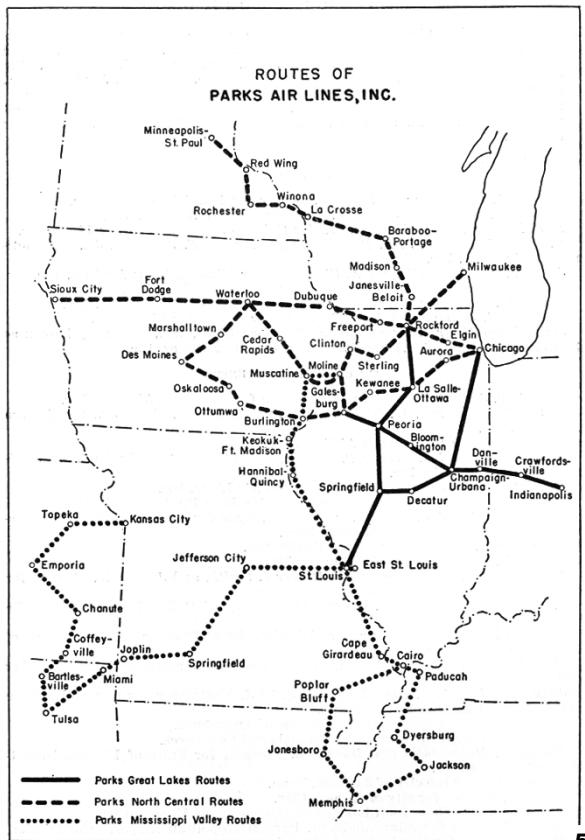
to operate, Ozark's founding fathers could prove to the CAB they were able to run an airline. When the time came for the CAB to issue a sought-after Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity, which was required for operating an interstate airline, the Board would look more favorably upon a company that already had operating experience.

On January 10, 1945, scheduled service started with three Beech Model F-17D Staggerwing aircraft. A triangle route pattern was flown, with one aircraft leaving Springfield for Kansas City via Clinton, Missouri, and one departing for St. Louis via Rolla. From those terminals, the aircraft proceeded to Columbia, Missouri, and then repeated the pattern back to Springfield. Warrensburg, Missouri, replaced Clinton in April 1945 due to the latter's poor airport conditions.

According to Arthur Heyne, some passengers on Ozark's early system wanted to continue their travels beyond St. Louis or Kansas City, Missouri. Because of its status as an intra-state carrier, Ozark was prohibited from carrying passengers intending to make such journeys. So, to make sure the CAB was aware that Ozark was playing by the rules, the company began requiring customers bound for St. Louis or Kansas City to sign an affidavit that they were not planning to travel beyond those cities.

Toward the end of summer 1945, Ozark replaced its fleet of Staggerwings with two Cessna C-78s converted to T-50s: five-seat, twin-engine aircraft.

Columbia was eliminated from the system, and Fort Leonard



11 C. A. B.—779

Wood added as an intermediate point on the Springfield - St. Louis route. Ozark's intra-state service became increasingly popular as the months of 1945 passed, but the decision was made to shut down the airline in early November - just shy of 10 months after it had first taken to the air. Although the service had gained in popularity, the company had yet to turn a profit, and the owners decided to end the drain on their personal finances.

Now, with a little bit of experience under their belts, the founding fathers were ready to apply for interstate routes. In the Mississippi Valley Case, decided in 1947, Ozark applied to the CAB for a route pattern in the shape of an X: one line stretching from Kansas City to Montgomery, Alabama, via nine intermediate points, the other running from

5 As a result of three separate route cases, the CAB wound up awarding Parks Air Lines authority to serve 70 cities in 11 states. The Board would come to regret its decisions. // CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD VIA DAVID H. STRINGER

6 Hoping to get his airline operating, Oliver Parks acquired "new capital" and DC-3s through a merger with Twentieth Century Airlines, a large irregular (non-skied) carrier. But the CAB told Parks that it was too late. // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION



St. Louis to Tulsa, Oklahoma, with four stops along the way. The two routes would intersect at Springfield, Missouri. Also included in the application were three different routings from Kansas City to St. Louis via different sets of intermediate stations. Altogether, the requested network would have served 28 cities in six states.

Unfortunately, the application was not approved. Instead, the Board issued a certificate to Parks Air Lines for feeder routes in the area.

PARKS AIR LINES

By the mid-1940s, Oliver L. Parks was a force to be reckoned with. He was a well-known man in aviation circles who had formed a Pilot training school in East St. Louis in 1927. By the mid-1930s, he was operating a full-fledged aviation academy which he named Parks Air College. As part of the curriculum, Parks operated a 'non-commercial airline' for three months of every school year as a device for educating his students in all

aspects of airline operation. His college was based at his own airport, the Parks Metropolitan Airport, formerly the Curtiss-Parks Airport, in East St. Louis.

When the US military required training for thousands of Pilots during World War II, Parks - with government contracts - opened several additional facilities for that purpose: the Alabama Institute of Aeronautics, the Mississippi, the Missouri, and the Cape Institutes of Aeronautics. After the war he merged his assets into Parks Aircraft Sales and Service, Inc., which operated fixed-base operations (FBOs) in Chicago, Kansas City, Indianapolis and Cleveland in addition to the Air College and an FBO in East St. Louis.

Consequently, by the time the CAB held hearings on new feeder routes after the war, Oliver Parks was a respected name recognized by everyone in the realm of aviation. He was just the type of experienced person that the Board was looking for to bid on the proposed new feeder services.



7

7 • 8 Parks was defiant and inaugurated service over one route: E. St. Louis/St.Louis - Springfield - Decatur - Champaign/Urbana - Chicago. But the CAB nullified Parks' operating certificate in late July 1950. // 7) R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION. 8) DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

8

Fly

PARKS "LOCALINERS"

Dependable DC-3 Airlines

MORNING and EVENING SERVICE for COMFORT and CONVENIENCE

FLIGHT SCHEDULE

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Springfield
St. Louis
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BUY ROUND TRIP... SAVE MORE MONEY

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EFFECTIVE AUGUST 1, 1950

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4 FLIGHTS A DAY... 2 EACH WAY

It was no surprise then that Parks, filing an application as Parks Air Transport, won five of the routes awarded in the CAB's North Central Case, decided December 19, 1946. The granted routes extended from Chicago to Minneapolis/St. Paul, Chicago to Des Moines, Chicago to Sioux City, and Milwaukee to Des Moines, each with several intermediate stops. There was also a connector route between Galesburg and Moline, Illinois.

East St. Louis, Illinois via intermediate points; Galesburg, Illinois, to Indianapolis, Indiana, via intermediate points; and Indianapolis to St. Louis/East St. Louis via intermediate points. Of course, it was the intermediate points that provided the purpose for the awards. The new feeder airlines, which would later be renamed local service airlines, were intended to bring air service to small and medium-sized communities.

Each of Parks' initial awards was valid for a period of three years.

The CAB's confidence in Mr. Parks' ability did not stop there. On September 3, 1947, with the Board noting that "Mr. Oliver L. Parks has a wide background of experience in the field of aviation", Parks Air Transport was selected in the Great Lakes Case to operate three routes: Rockford, Illinois, to the co-terminal St. Louis, Missouri/

In a final vote of trust, on December 18, 1947, the CAB selected Parks to transport "persons, property and mail" over yet another set of routes, these awarded in the Mississippi Valley Case. The additions to

GENERAL INFORMATION

SPACE. Ozark Air Lines has 28 seats available on North flights. Seats used on return are subject to space whether or not they have reservations. It is Ozark's desire to provide the most comfortable transportation with a minimum of inconvenience to our patrons.

RESERVATIONS may be made in advance. Passengers should present themselves at the airport offices of Ozark Air Lines at least two minutes prior to plane departure time.

CANCELLATIONS. Ozark Air Lines reserves the right to cancel any flight before passage begins or cancel whenever such action is deemed advisable or necessary. In all events the passenger's full fare must be retained by the company if cancellation occurs within 24 hours of departure.

BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE. Forty pounds of luggage, including total case and hand baggage, will be carried free on any flights. Charge for excess baggage, up to 50 pounds, is \$1.00 a pound at the one-way fare per pound, with a minimum charge of 20 cents.

CHILDREN'S FARES. A child under two years of age will be carried free of fare or tax. Children two years of age and under twelve will be charged one-half the applicable adult fare.

FAMILY EXCURSION FARE. Applications for flights with additional passengers not earlier than ordinarily breakfast night or even later than midday, provided the passengers are traveling in the same local for the benefit of the family and the passenger (Ozark) at the adult economy local fare for each other eligible member of the family.

SENIORLINES above the ages at which passes may be expected to arrive at or depart from planes. Just like Ozark will not accept any application for passes unless the passenger is in the possession of the certificate of convenience, and these senior rates extend to those without routes.

REFUNDS. Within the time limit of the ticket, whatever will be incurred at any authorized airport provided prior arrangements have been made. Passenger assumes responsibility of all expenses of removal, transportation, retransit.

CIA CERTIFICATES. For the purpose of convenience, Ozark Air Lines will be glad to issue test or final certification if made to receive ticket again before departure of plane.

FLY OZARK



9

the route map awarded this time would extend Parks Air Transport south to Tennessee and west to Kansas with lines extending from St. Louis/E. St. Louis to Memphis, and to Tulsa via intermediate stops. An appendage would head north from Tulsa to Kansas City serving five smaller cities enroute. Finally, a route was awarded to Parks that would extend from St. Louis/E. St. Louis to the co-terminal Moline, Illinois/Davenport, Iowa via several cities in Illinois and Iowa. Parks was selected over Ozark Air Lines (now separating Air Lines into two words) partly because of Parks' "long and varied experience in aviation."

Finding Parks to be "fit, willing and able" to serve such a large area, the CAB noted that these awards "will demonstrate the

effectiveness of increased size of local operations in meeting the problems of operating costs, equipment, equipment utilization and financing."

The CAB would come to regret its decision.

THE PARKS INVESTIGATION CASE

As the months passed, new feeder airlines with Certificates of Convenience and Necessity began to get their fledgling operations into the air around the country. But the Parks system remained notably dormant. This was particularly disturbing because Parks had been awarded such a large network, and a requirement of the awards was that service must start within 90 days of the certificate's effective date. The cities and towns that

had lobbied for new air service were expecting it.

When Parks Air Transport, now calling itself Parks Air Lines, had not inaugurated service over any of its routes by mid-March of 1949, the CAB decreed that the company would have 102 days in which to get its act together. The Board stated that service over the certificated routes must be inaugurated by July 1, 1949.

Oliver Parks and his executive team had had difficulty raising the capital required to start operations. More specifically, they had apparently been unwilling to risk much of their own money on this new feeder operation. When Parks had applied to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) for a loan to help get his airline off the ground, he had been refused because he had lacked sufficient equity capital.

Parks and his associates quickly came up with a new plan. They approached the board of Mid-Continent Airlines, a certificated trunk carrier with a route system stretching from Minot, North Dakota, to New Orleans. Mid-Continent was a financially healthy, conservative company that still operated an all-DC-3 fleet. The plan was for Mid-Continent to acquire Parks by exchanging 13,496 shares of Mid-Continent stock for the total outstanding stock of Parks: 32,392 shares. This would, of course, put money into the pockets of Oliver Parks and his cohorts. Mid-Continent would operate Parks Air Lines as a wholly-owned subsidiary. The Mid-Continent Board of Directors authorized this agreement at their annual meeting on May 5, 1949, and a

⑨ Ozark's first timetable as a CAB-certified local service airline, effective September 26, 1950. // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION



⑩ A 1951 photo showing (L-R) Ozark Pilots Jay Powell, Dick Disney, and Herb Fink, with Flight Attendant Lita Marie 'Sunnee' Sund. While Powell and Fink have Ozark cap badges, Disney's cap sports Parks wings with the name Ozark painted over. // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION

⑪ Early 1950s photo of an Ozark DC-3 at St. Louis (STL). // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION



public hearing before the CAB in Washington, DC, was set for September 28, 1949.

The Parks Investigation Case was launched, and it is no exaggeration to say that the Civil Aeronautics Board was livid! The Parks team contended that circumstances beyond its control had prevented it from obtaining the necessary financing to start service as an independent company prior to expiration of the designated period, and its

acquisition by Mid-Continent should be approved. If not, they argued that Parks should be permitted to retain its certificate and conduct operations as an independent company with small, single-engine aircraft.

The CAB responded: "We feel that the record warrants a conclusion that Mr. Parks and his associates could long ago have taken steps that would have resulted in the start of service over a substantial part,

or perhaps over all, of the routes if they had been willing to risk their own capital in the manner that the Board had a right to expect in the light of the presentation made on behalf of Parks at the original hearings." When the awards were first made, Oliver Parks had stated that he, his directors and the companies he controlled would provide approximately US\$650,000.00 of equity capital. Only US\$81,000.00 had been contributed by 1950.

Continuing its response, the Board stated that approval of Mid-Continent's acquisition of Parks would not only condone the unreasonable delay in inaugurating service but would also permit Oliver Parks and his associates to profit from their inaction.

Then, on May 17, 1950, Mr. Parks announced that he had found "new capital" and could activate the routes with twin-engine aircraft. The sudden change of fortune had come from the 'merger' of a struggling non-scheduled carrier, Twentieth Century Airlines of Charlotte, North Carolina, into the Parks organization. With Twentieth Century came DC-3s and two founders of that airline now willing to throw in their lot with Oliver Parks: the Reverend Chris A. Bachman, an ordained minister and president of Twentieth Century, and Glenn O. Shaver, the company's general manager and a Pilot.

But the CAB told Oliver Parks that it was too late: "There must come a time when administrative proceedings of this nature are brought to a close."

It appeared pretty obvious that the CAB wanted to put the

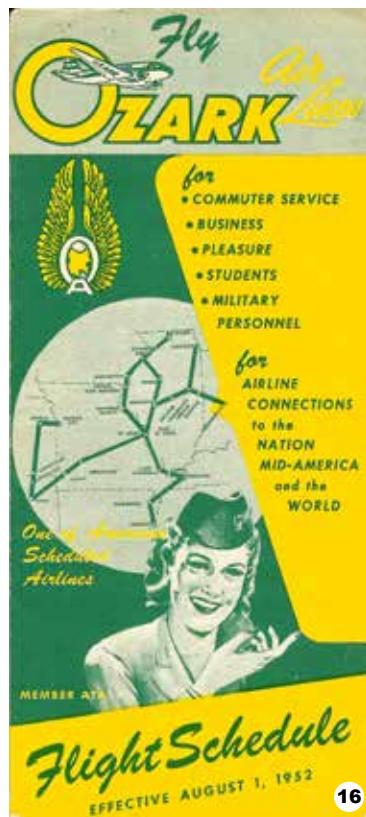
whole Parks ordeal behind and give the routes in question to other applicants. The companies that wanted Parks' routes were: Central Airlines, Keith Kale's new feeder operation based in Fort Worth; Turner Airlines, the company associated with famed flyer Roscoe Turner, which would soon change its name to Lake Central Airlines; Continental Southern Lines, owned by the Trailways Bus Company of Dallas; Wisconsin Central Airlines, which would eventually change its name to North Central; and the company that had run an intra-state operation five years earlier: Ozark Air Lines.

But Oliver L. Parks would not go down without a fight. On

12 Ozark's route system as of September 1, 1951. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

13 An Ozark DC-3 over Springfield, Illinois in 1951. // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION





June 21, 1950, Parks Air Lines inaugurated service over the St. Louis-to-Chicago route with intermediate stops in Springfield, Decatur, and Champaign/Urbana, Illinois. Parks stated that he intended to commence service over the other routes, activating his entire system, by November 6, 1950. He said that he now had the organization and the financing to accomplish this.

But the Board had had enough of Oliver Parks. On July 28, 1950, it was announced that Parks Air Lines' certificate had been nullified by the CAB.

MR. HEYNE GETS A PHONE CALL

In late July 1950, Arthur G. Heyne - the attorney who had been part of Ozark's team of founding executives - received a telephone call. It was from his

friend Clyde Brayton, of Brayton Flying Service. Brayton was also an instructor at Parks Air College.

"Congratulations!"

"For what?" Heyne replied.

"I see you just got a certificate from the CAB!"

"Aw, you're pullin' my leg. It's been seven years. Are you sure it's us?" Heyne asked.

14 Ozark's August 1, 1951 timetable. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

15 Ozark adopted this logo in late 1951 and employed it through most of the decade. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

16 Ozark's timetable effective August 1, 1952. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

17 Ozark Stewardess (Flight Attendant) Dee Thayer, circa 1953. // R. DEAN DENTON COLLECTION

The official telegram arrived on August 1, 1950. Ozark Air Lines had, indeed, been awarded all of Parks' routes from the Great Lakes and Mississippi Valley cases. The only other beneficiary was Mid-Continent Airlines, which was given routes into Chicago and Milwaukee originally awarded to Parks in the North Central Case.

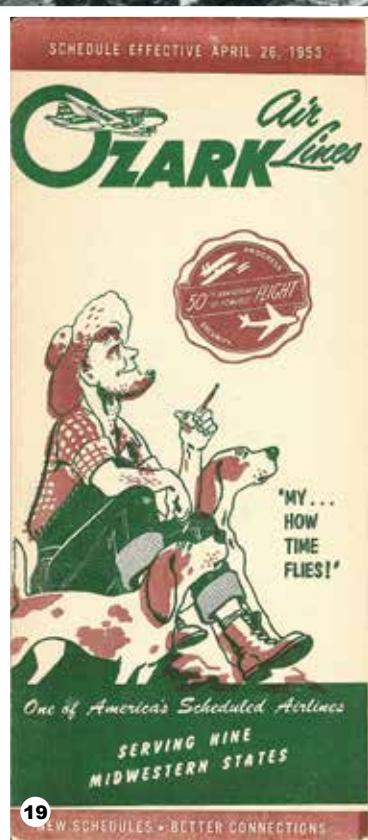
Ozark was selected over the other applicants for several reasons. It was most familiar with the area to be served. Ozark would be headquartered in St. Louis, as was Parks, from where the system would radiate, and Ozark's financial plan was



18

18 An Ozark DC-3 over St. Louis. R. // DEAN DENTON COLLECTION

19 Ozark's timetable effective April 26, 1953. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION



19

sound, although the examiner did express some doubt that the company had the resources to start both the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley routes.

The four incorporators were ecstatic. But the reality of the situation quickly brought them down to Earth. A meeting was held at Floyd W. Jones's Riverdale estate near Springfield, Missouri. The Korean War had just started, and the United States government put a freeze on available aircraft. "All those World War II surplus DC-3s and C-47s vanished", according to Heyne. There had to be some

quick thinking and fast action to get an airline, a big feeder airline, up and operating quickly.

Oliver Parks was invited to Riverdale and Glenn O. Shaver flew him out there in a Parks Air Lines DC-3. Parks had filed lawsuits in conjunction with the CAB's actions. Ozark wanted what Parks could offer: DC-3s, Pilots, and other personnel. It took some convincing, but a deal was struck to exchange Ozark Air Lines stock for Parks Air Lines stock, which required having the lawsuits dismissed. That involved a trip to Washington where the Parks fight was laid to



20 DC-3 N137D was photographed by Bob Woodling at Kansas City (MKC).
// PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

(2) L to R) Mayor Joe Lenski, First Officer Richard Bullard, Stewardess Dee Thayer, and Capt. Harry Whipple celebrate one year of Ozark service to Pittsburg, Kansas, on September 6, 1954. // **R.**
**DEAN DENTON
COLLECTION**

22 Ozark's March
1, 1954 timetable.
// DAVID H.
STRINGER
COLLECTION



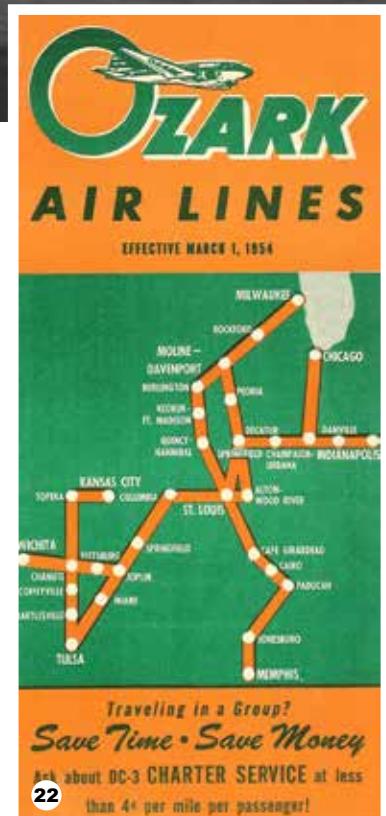
rest. According to Arthur Heyne "Ozark, in essence, merged Parks Air Lines into its organization—the only solution since each badly needed one another."

Ozark's Board of Directors now consisted of five Ozark men (Laddie Hamilton, Floyd W. Jones, Arthur Heyne, Barak T. Mattingly, and J.B. 'Doc' Carl) and three from Parks Air Lines: Oliver L. Parks himself, Captain Glenn O. Shaver, and The Reverend

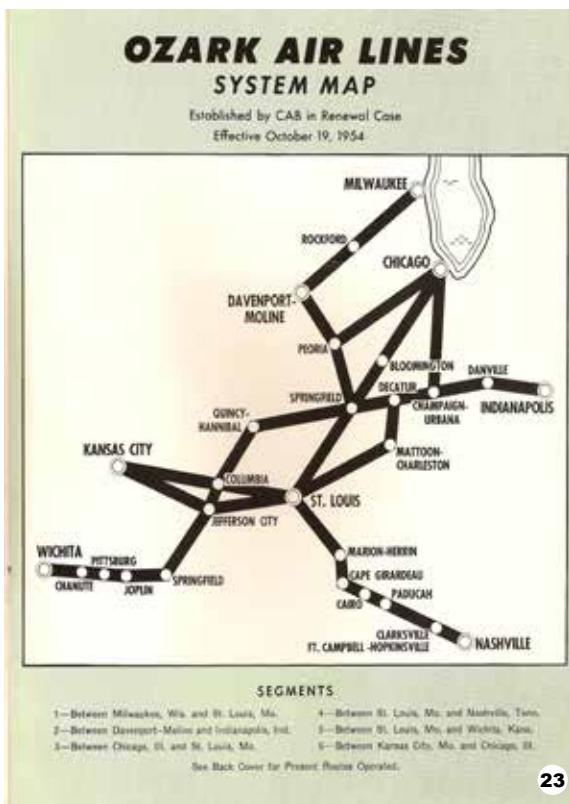
Chris A. Bachman. Oliver Parks would remain on Ozark's Board of Directors for several years although his attention would become more focused on his real estate firm, which built "medium-priced homes" in the St. Louis area.

WELCOME ABOARD OZARK AIR LINES!

Ozark became the last, and thus, the youngest, of the air



carriers that would develop into the 13 permanently certificated local service airlines of the 1950s. The certificate for Ozark's operation of its new route system became effective on September 26, 1950. On the evening of September 25, the Ozark group gathered at the Statler Hotel in downtown St. Louis and waited for the stroke of midnight. At 00:01, the founders of Ozark signed the paperwork officially accepting the certificate and the



airline was in business. At 06:58 that morning, Ozark's first flight took off from St. Louis' Lambert Field bound for Springfield, Illinois, Champaign/Urbana, and Chicago... with one passenger on board! That would be the first in a history of flights that lasted for 36 years.

Ozark's initial fleet consisted of four Douglas DC-3s inherited from Parks Air Lines. The story goes that the P and

the S were removed from the Parks name on the planes and an OZ was added ahead of the remaining ARK.

The initial fleet was a mismatched lot of Gooney Birds. It would not be until 1951 that all of Ozark's DC-3s were standardized with the same equipment and interiors.

By the end of 1950, the fleet total had doubled to eight DC-3s.

With all of Parks', and thus Ozark's, maintenance facilities located at Parks Metropolitan Airport in East St. Louis, Ozark's flights were scheduled to originate in East St. Louis and then fly across the river and north to Lambert Field. From Lambert, the aircraft would continue on their scheduled routing. East St. Louis was dropped from the schedules in January 1951, but the routine of ferrying airplanes back and forth across the river continued until the company had its own facilities at Lambert Field.

On November 6, 1950, Ozark inaugurated service over the St. Louis - Moline/Davenport route (with only four stops instead of the originally planned six) and the Moline/Davenport - Indianapolis route.

23 Ozark's certificate renewal by the CAB in 1954 included route realignment that dropped several cities and added others to the system. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

24 Service to Owensboro and Louisville, Kentucky, was added in 1955. // DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

25 DC-3 N143D was photographed at Chicago's Midway Airport (MDW) by Lester Hendren. // PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION

The fact that Ozark managed to get a good part of its route system up and running before the end of 1950 was due in large part to the manpower, the expertise, and the equipment provided by the Parks team. Many of Parks Air Lines' employees went on to enjoy long careers with Ozark and were instrumental in building a great airline. By the end of 1950, Ozark was operating scheduled service into 14 airports in four states.

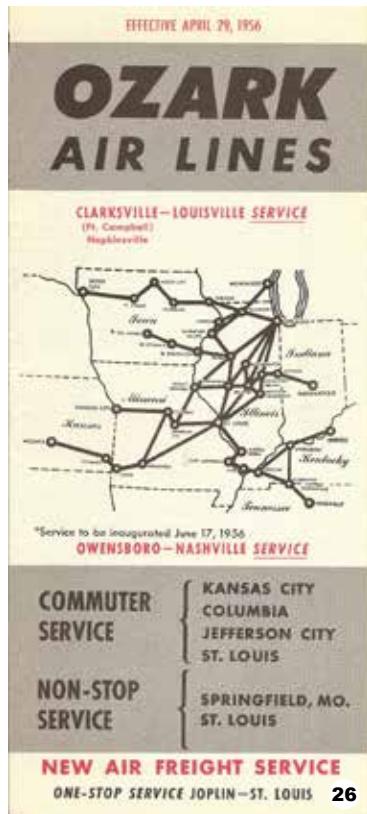
In January 1951, the route south from St. Louis to Memphis was activated. The Memphis service operated via Cape Girardeau and Cairo, Illinois, and Paducah, Kentucky. From Paducah, the two daily flights would proceed to Dyersburg and Jackson, Tennessee before arriving in Memphis. Later in the year, one of the flights was scheduled to proceed from Paducah to Memphis via Jonesboro, Arkansas, while the other continued to serve the Tennessee communities.

AIRWAYS HISTORY

26 27 28
Timetables from 1956 and 1957 advertise new services available to Ozark customers.
// DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION

29 An Ozark DC-3, sporting new wheel well doors, is serviced between flights at Chicago (Midway).
// PAUL ZOGG COLLECTION

30 This lovely view of DC-3 N142D was captured by photographer Bob Woodling at Kansas City (MKC).
// PROCTOR-LIVESEY-THOMAS COLLECTION



Service to Rockford, Illinois, was introduced on January 11, 1951.

On March 15, 1951, Ozark launched the route west to Floyd W. Jones' hometown of Springfield, Missouri, and on to Joplin and Tulsa. The appendage northward from Tulsa to Kansas

City via intermediate stops became active on August 8.

In less than one year from the time of its first flight, Ozark had inaugurated service to 29 stations covering all of the routes awarded to the company as a result of the Parks Investigation Case. Laddie

Hamilton's dream was now a firmly established reality.

STEADY GROWTH AND A STABLE FUTURE

In June of 1951, St. Louis became the first Ozark station to board over 1,000 passengers in a single month (1,140, to be exact) and, for the first full calendar year of operation—January through December 1951—a total of 49,507 customers flew Ozark.

In July 1952, Ozark moved into a new hangar at Lambert Field. The facility, built for the airline by the City of St. Louis, had 36,000sq ft (3,345m²) of floor space, enough to accommodate seven DC-3s. An air-conditioned building attached to the new hangar served as the company's headquarters.

The airline grew steadily, adding new stations and



30

deleting unproductive points as allowed by the CAB. Service to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and to Pittsburg and Wichita, Kansas, was introduced in 1953.

Ozark worked with the cities it served to establish navigational aids and equipment for instrument flying and night operations. This project, completed by September 1953, enabled Ozark to operate into and out of every airport on its system by instruments, both day and night.

In 1954, Ozark's original three-year temporary Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity was renewed for another five years. With the renewal, the CAB tweaked the airline's route system. Service to Memphis was discontinued while Nashville, Tennessee, was authorized as the terminal point beyond Paducah. The route map was also redrawn west of St. Louis: the route to Tulsa was eliminated as was the Tulsa-Kansas City appendage. Flights into Kansas City were now operated from Chicago via intermediate points. At the same time, more authority was granted for service into and out of the Windy City.

Ozark's redefined route system promised more revenue for the company, but the real prize came the following year. On May 19, 1955, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the bill that gave permanent certification to Ozark and to the nation's 12 other local service airlines. This acknowledgement of a permanent place in the US airline system made investors much more confident about betting their money on Ozark stock.

In April 1955, the route to Nashville was opened. Also, that year, the route from Sioux City to Chicago via intermediate stops, which had been awarded to Mid-Continent Airlines instead of to Ozark in 1950, was transferred to Ozark from Braniff International Airways, which had acquired Mid-Continent. Towards the end of the year, Ozark began service over an extension from Paducah to Louisville via Owensboro.

In order to keep Ozark's aging fleet as competitive as possible, management undertook a modification program for its old Douglas airliners. Dubbed the Challenger 250 project, the goal was to upgrade the fleet to higher performance standards

by installing wheel well doors, flush-type antennas, short exhaust stacks, wing fillets, and aerodynamic oil coolers, turning Ozark's DC-3s into the most efficient in the industry. The program was completed by September 1957, when all 20 of the company's DC-3s had been standardized with the new equipment and each had been configured with 27 passenger seats.

But company officials had already started looking at newer aircraft types to supplement and eventually replace the DC-3s. A new era for Ozark was on the horizon. ☀

PART TWO OF THE OZARK AIR LINES STORY WILL APPEAR IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF AIRWAYS

A version of this series of articles about Ozark appeared in Airways back in 2012. The Ozark Air Lines story will also be included in the forthcoming book, *Exploring Airline History with David H. Stringer: The Airways Magazine Articles, Volume Three*.

LADDIE HAMILTON



Laddie Hamilton had transportation in his blood. Born in Fowler, Meade County, Kansas, on June 28, 1910, the son of Elmer and Nellie Hamilton, his given name was Homer Dale Hamilton. Educated in the public schools of Dodge City until 1919, he moved with his family to Missouri, where his father was employed with the St. Louis – San Francisco (Frisco) Railway. Laddie returned to Dodge City in 1926, where he developed his mechanical skills as the manager of the Service Department at Carl-Fay Motor Co. He obtained his first Pilot's license in 1928, and, in 1931, he moved back to Missouri where he purchased and operated his own successful garage.

He met Floyd W. Jones of Springfield, Missouri, the owner of MoArk Coach Lines (later MoArk Trailways). The team of Jones and Hamilton would work well together. Jones hired Hamilton as a bus driver, then, in January 1936, sent him to Florence, Alabama, to manage the southern end of his bus system, which stretched from Kansas City to Memphis and from Memphis to Florence. While working for MoArk in

Alabama, Laddie Hamilton saw an opportunity in another bus company that was foundering.

Hamilton moved to Tuscaloosa and, in 1937, with the financial help of Floyd W. Jones, purchased the bankrupt Dixie Coaches, a bus line operating in Alabama and Mississippi. He resuscitated the company, turning it into a financially healthy enterprise, and then sold it to Southeastern Greyhound Lines in 1942 for a tidy profit. It would not be the last time that Laddie Hamilton's ideas reached out for Floyd W. Jones' financial backing.

Laddie Hamilton's interest then turned to aviation. Although he remained Regional Manager of the Tuscaloosa Division of Southeastern Greyhound until 1946, he had been working half-days at Oliver Parks' Alabama Institute of Aeronautics, located at Van de Graaf Field in Tuscaloosa, offering flight instruction for prospective Army Pilots during the war. At the end of World War II, Hamilton, along with two associates, purchased the assets of the Alabama Institute of Aeronautics, changed the name to Dixie Air, Inc., and turned it into a fixed base operation featuring aircraft sales, maintenance, and flight instruction.

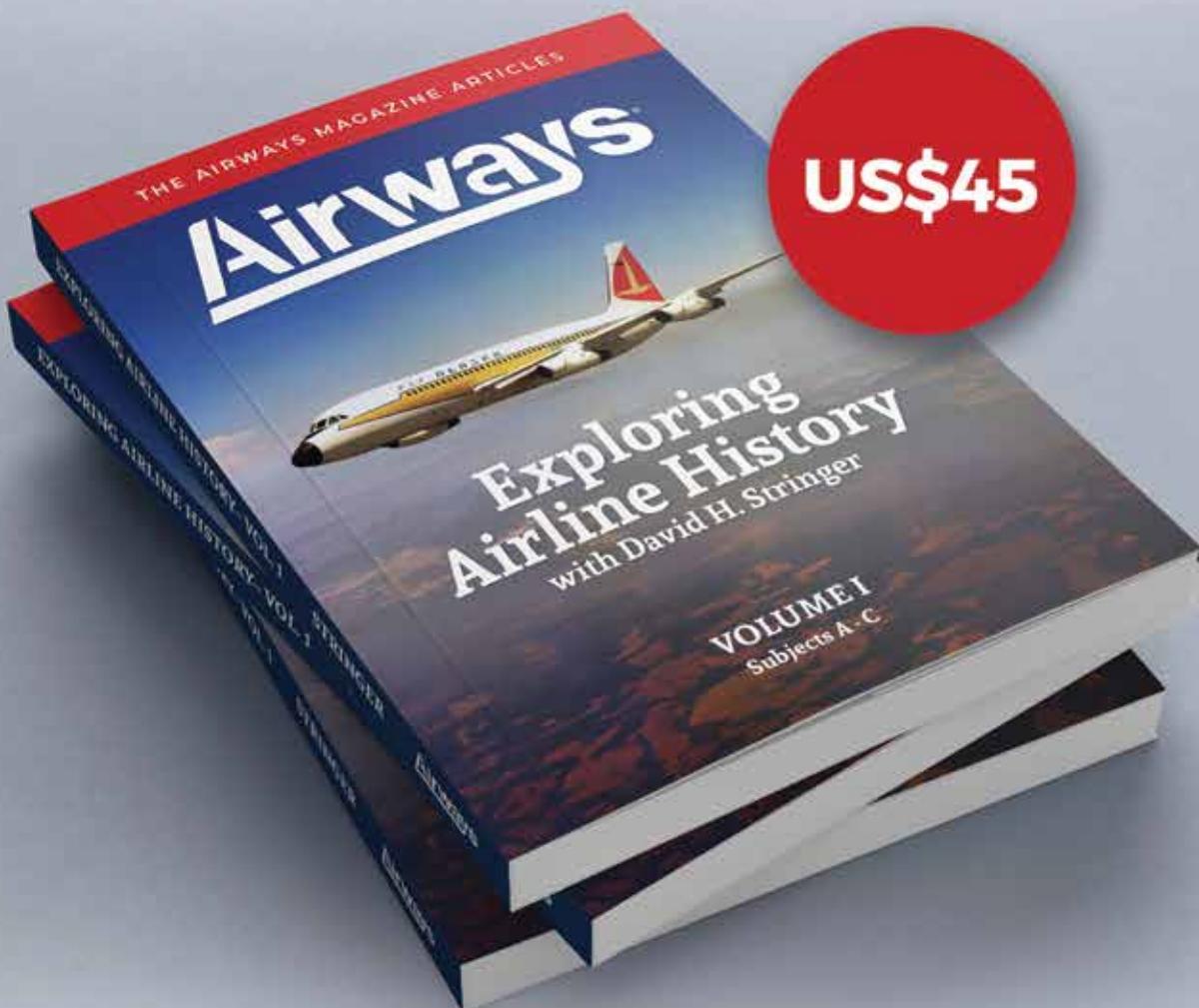
When the time came to create his airline, Hamilton approached Jones once again. Of course, as Jones lived in Springfield, Missouri, 'The Gateway to the Ozarks', the company would certainly include a presence in Springfield. Laddie Hamilton, the go-getter with the ideas, and Floyd W. Jones, the businessman with the money, joined with attorneys Barak T. Mattingly and Arthur Heyne to form the team that created Ozark Air Lines. Hamilton would become President, Jones, Treasurer and Member of the Board, Mattingly, Chairman of the Board and Chief Legal Counsel, and Heyne, Secretary and Member of the Board.

At Ozark, Laddie Hamilton was known as the Pilots' friend. He was interested in their concerns and respected their opinions—one of those true airline people who loved the industry. Hamilton stayed with Ozark, the airline he founded, until he chose to resign for health reasons in 1959. He passed away in 1971 at age 61.

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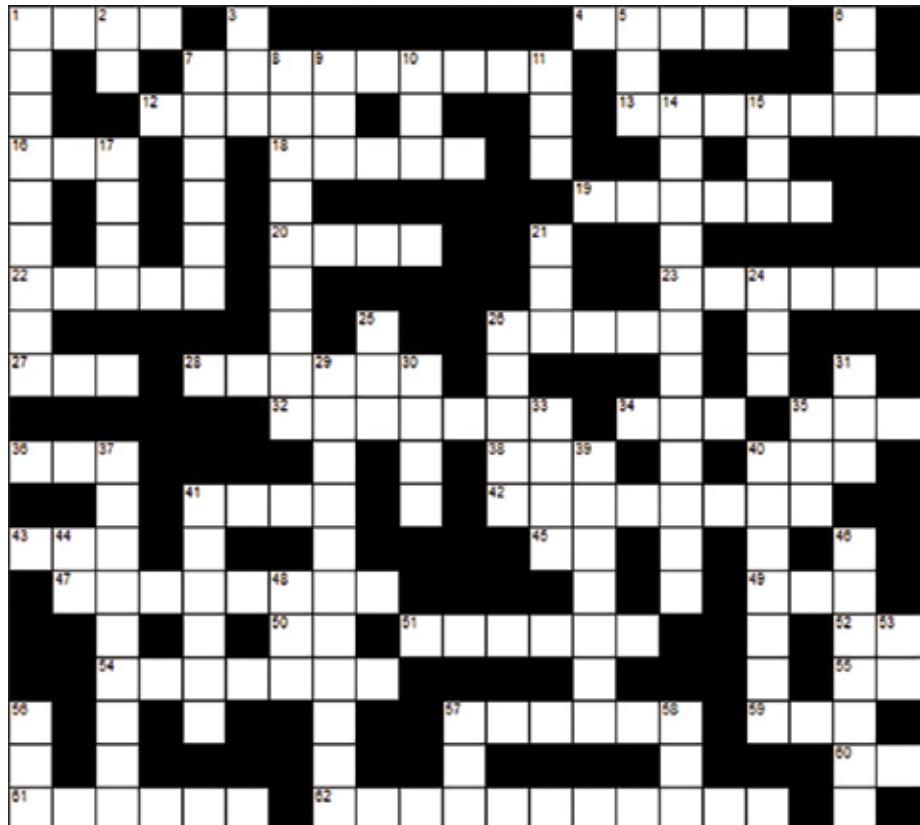
CROSSWORD

Across

1. ...Line Air, acquired by VIM Airlines in 1995
4. Aerovias...., predecessor of Aeromexico
7. Official permission
12. Last passenger DC-10 operator
13. Jorge... Latin American aviation pioneer
16. Estimated time of departure
18. Servicio Aereo de Honduras, SA
19. Bright Flashing Light
20. Fly low over people or buildings
22. Aviation Gasoline
23. Maker of world's first twin-engined widebody
26. Singapore-based low-cost long-haul airline
27. Defunct all-business class airline
28. Enclosed structure for housing aircraft
32. Not on time
34. European Air Transport
35. LaGuardia Airport
36. Poland's flag carrier
38. Trans International Airlines (1947-1986)
40. Hummingbird in tail
41. First pilot flight on his / her own
42. Flying an aircraft
43. Avions de transport régional
45. Extended Range
47. North Central Airlines and Southern Airways result
49. Korean Air Lines
50. British Airways
51. Convex or concave curvature of an airfoil.
52. Mesa Airlines
54. Amelia Earhart's missed destination
55. Egyptair
57. Creators of 2-0-2 and 4-0-4
59. Air Portugal
60. Islas Airways
61. Originally named Chicago Air Park
62. Flight control surface

Down

1. Rudder, fin, stabilizer and elevator
2. Aeroflot Russian Airlines
3. Antilliaanse Luchtvaart Maatschappij
5. Ulsan Airport
6. Laws under which airmen fly in the US
7. AirTran callsign
8. Going towards the east
9. Haneda-based carrier
10. Amsterdam Airport Schiphol
11. ...Aviation, defunct Alaska carrier
14. Portuguese leasing and charter carrier
15. ...Líneas Aéreas (2005-2015)



17. Air resistance
21. San Carlos de Bariloche Airport
24. Roswell International Air Center
25. Delta Air Lines
26. Defunct Ecuadorean carrier
29. Dimitris... Aegean's CEO
30. Parking lot for aircraft
31. Above Ground Level
33. Steep nose-down attitude of an aircraft
35. Latin American 787-8 and -9 operator
37. Initial runway section
39. Hughes... Top Banana in the West
40. Flight Deck
41. Transponder four-digit number
44. Tiger Airways
46. Former Greece flag carrier
48. Leeds-Bradford Airport
53. Virgin Atlantic
56. Jacinto Lara International Airport
57. General Mitchell International Airport
58. ... Air, Bangkok-based low-cost carrier

ANSWER KEY | February 2025 Issue



Answers will be unveiled in our next issue
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