

= Virgin Atlantic Little Red =

Virgin Atlantic Little Red ( also referred to as Virgin Little Red and Little Red ) was a British airline subsidiary owned by Virgin Atlantic . It was created in 2012 as a way to provide competition for aviation giant British Airways ( BA ) on UK domestic mainland flights to Aberdeen , Edinburgh and Manchester from London Heathrow Airport .

During its operation , the airline operated four Airbus A320s wet leased from Irish airline Aer Lingus and served a network of four domestic destinations . The airline ceased operations in 2015 following low passenger numbers .

= = History = =

In 2012 , British Airways took over British Midland International ( BMI ) which gave them a monopoly on UK mainland flights from Heathrow . In order for the deal to be completed , the European Union Competition Commissioner decreed that BA would have to give up 14 of BMI 's landing slots at Heathrow to comply with EU competition regulations . 12 of these slots were set aside for domestic usage , which were bought by Virgin Atlantic after they outbid Aer Lingus for the required British domestic operating licence . Virgin announced that they would set up Virgin Atlantic Little Red as a subsidiary to use these slots to cover domestic UK mainland routes as Aer Lingus already provided competition for BA on flights to Northern Ireland from Heathrow . Little Red was later revealed to be operated on a wet @-@ lease by Aer Lingus whereby the planes would be operated by Aer Lingus but would bear Virgin Atlantic livery . The pilots would be employed by Aer Lingus , with cabin crew supplied by McGinley Aviation . The cabin crew would wear Virgin Little Red uniforms and had training from Virgin , despite the fact that airline had not previously operated narrow @-@ body aircraft .

Virgin announced that initially the airline would operate four daily flights between London Heathrow Airport and Manchester Airport , six daily flights between Heathrow and Edinburgh Airport , and three daily flights between Heathrow and Aberdeen Airport . The airline brand made its first flight on 31 March 2013 , flying from Manchester to Heathrow .

The new service was launched in 2013 with owner Sir Richard Branson stating his intent to compete with BA with " Virgin 's rock and roll spirit " and to allow Virgin Atlantic 's long haul passengers to connect to the rest of the UK using Virgin . In its first six months of operation , Little Red transported 250 @,@ 000 passengers . Despite Branson 's aim and a rise in passenger numbers during the first few months of Little Red 's existence , the majority of Little Red 's passengers were eventually using it for domestic flights only which led to flights often departing with only a third of seats sold . The Civil Aviation Authority published figures that revealed that Little Red had the worst load figures of any airline in aviation at the time with 37 @.@ 6 % of passenger seats occupied . International Airlines Group CEO , Willie Walsh had criticised Little Red calling it a " mistake " and stated " You cannot make money flying aircraft that are less than half full . "

= = Closure = =

Virgin had claimed that they were prepared to take losses on Little Red , estimated to be up to £ 3 million a week , in order to wait for an expansion in brand awareness . Virgin then stated that losses on Little Red would be covered by Virgin Atlantic 's transatlantic routes . Despite this , as a result of the low passenger numbers in October 2014 , it was announced that Little Red would cease to operate from September 2015 . This was attributed to BA 's dominance of the UK domestic market and Heathrow 's restrictions of the usage of the small number of slots available . The slot limitation issue had been mentioned at Little Red 's foundation in that the slots to Scottish airports could only be used to fly to Edinburgh and Aberdeen . It was also claimed in the media that passengers preferred to use low @-@ cost carriers such as EasyJet to fly to and from other London airports aside of Heathrow for domestic travel owing to pricing .

Little Red 's flights to Manchester ended in March 2015 with the final flights to Edinburgh and

Aberdeen departing on 26 September 2015 . The planes were returned for Aer Lingus ' sole use in the Republic of Ireland following the final passenger flights of Little Red . After the closure of Little Red , all but three of the Heathrow slots were returned to BA and adsorbed back into their operation , thus granting them a monopoly on UK mainland domestic flights at Heathrow for the first time since British Midland Airways ( as BMI were named at the time ) moved into Heathrow in 1982 . However this was dependent on another airline not being willing to take the place of Little Red in running domestic flights from Heathrow . Virgin leased out the three slots it retained .

= = Fleet = =

During its operation , Virgin Atlantic Little Red 's fleet consisted of four Airbus A320s wet leased from Aer Lingus under a three @-@ year contract . The aircraft had 29 rows of seating with a 3 ? 3 configuration , for a total of 174 seats . The fleet was painted with Virgin Atlantic livery with future plans to eventually repaint them with Little Red livery . However , due to the closure of operations , this rebrand of the planes never occurred and they retained their original livery .

There was consideration that Aer Lingus would take over the Little Red routes under their own brand with the Little Red fleet repainted . However they declined to do this stating that they wanted more flexibility with the returned aircraft to support their current fleet and operation .

= = Destinations = =

During its operation , Virgin Atlantic Little Red operated to four destinations in the United Kingdom .  
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