



TAILPIECES

by Joel Chusid

Joel Chusid is the General Manager, North America for Hainan Airlines, the People's Republic of China's fourth largest airline. An airline veteran and consultant, he has also contributed numerous feature articles to *Airliners*.

Contact him at joel@airliners.tv. (Unusual and interesting news items are always welcome!)

One Way to Save Fuel

Of late much news has been made on researching alternative fuel sources to reduce cost. Virgin Atlantic successfully tested a Boeing 747 with a blend of palm and coconut oil and kerosene from London to Amsterdam last spring. Airlines have implemented all sorts of measures to conserve the scarce resource. It has been proposed to tow airplanes to the runway from the gate to takeoff. Well, here is a new take, or shall we say old, on how one airline, at least unintentionally, managed to get its passengers into the act. In September a Shandong Airlines Bombardier CRJ-7 with 69 passengers landed at Zhengzhou, China, after a flight from Guilin and suddenly lost power. Attempts to tow the aircraft to the terminal failed, and passengers were asked to help workers push the 20 ton plane a half mile off the runway. The "human taxi" took two hours. I hope the passengers got some kind of compensation! It turns out that this was not the first time Shandong has resorted to human power. A few weeks earlier, airport workers at Yantai-Laishan Airport had to push another CRJ-7 (tail B-3008) off a flooded runway. Thanks to the internet, the pictures were widely circulated.

Serious Mischeck

Today's high tech systems have reduced the number of bags being "mischecked" (as opposed to being "misloaded") to the wrong destination, but human error is still a fact of life, or in this case, death. Airlines routinely transport bodies for burial, or "human

remains" as they are called, and in the case of American Airlines, "Jim Wilsons." When I worked in American reservations some decades back, any time a funeral home called, we were to transfer the call to the Jim Wilson Desk. A few months ago someone on that desk accidentally arranged for the shipment of a casket containing a deceased woman to Guatemala City (GUA), when the funeral was being held in Guayaquil, Ecuador (GYE). The funeral was delayed several days until the missing shipment was located, and the rightfully furious husband of the deceased was planning to sue American, as it was widely reported. While these situations are admittedly rare, a friend who worked the desk recalls another case some years ago. A distraught funeral director in Louisville called to report that just prior to the viewing, a widow was allowed to see her late husband's body in the casket and ran screaming from the room saying it wasn't him! It turned out that the husband's casket had been sent to a funeral parlor in Nashville, and vice versa. The Nashville funeral luckily involved a closed casket and the burial had not yet taken place, so the other grieving family was spared the shock.

Standards Taken Seriously

Airlines have taken heat in recent years for deteriorating service levels. The Chinese government, at least, takes quality standards seriously and strictly enforces them. Flights operating habitually late are cancelled. Last March China Eastern experienced labor problems and over two days 21 flights returned to Kunming after takeoff, greatly inconveniencing passengers. The event was widely publicized. CAAC, which is the organization responsible for civil aviation, fined the carrier and then revoked the rights in several profitable markets and awarded them to competitors. The airline said "it would take the lesson seriously" and also would settle with the hundreds of passengers who experienced the problems firsthand.

Some People Never Learn

Yes, there have been plenty of stories about drunken passengers causing a ruckus, and it is a global problem. It is more serious, however, when it is a member of the flight crew who has imbibed and violated governmental safety regulations, and that makes the news in spades. Last August a planeload of holiday bound Scots were delayed when the flight attendant for their BMI flight from Aberdeen, Scotland, to Faro, Portugal, showed up drunk at 9:00 a.m. Police were called, a breath test was administered, and the errant flight attendant was carted off to jail. In Knoxville, Tennessee, a United Express crew

on a layover decided to have a few drinks during a Mexican dinner the night before the scheduled flight. Things got a little rowdy and police were called. When they arrived, one of the pilots was mooning drivers on busy Alcoa Highway just down the road from the airport. Both pilots were arrested and suspended from the airline. Talk about bad judgment!

Mutiny at Nuremburg

I am not sure why Faro seems to be getting more than its share of unusual delays, but last September, after a Faro bound Air Berlin Boeing 737 crew made two unsuccessful departure attempts from the Nuremburg Airport in Germany, many of the 172 passengers protested and demanded a new aircraft be used. An airline spokeswoman felt the passengers were overreacting, and it appears they were. The first attempt was scrubbed after a cockpit display panel was discovered to be inoperative, so the plane returned to the gate for repairs. After a two hour delay, the passengers re-boarded. During the taxi-out, a flight attendant fainted, so it was back to the gate again. The passengers refused to board the same aircraft until Air Berlin flew in a replacement 737, 14 hours later, from Turkey. Not a good way to start a vacation!

JetBlue Has a Better Idea

A few months back, JetBlue got flack for announcing that it would no longer provide complimentary pillows and blankets. Instead, the airline would sell "The World's Cleanest" pillows on board in conjunction with a company called Clean Brands LLC for a nominal fee of \$7 for both pillow and blanket, complete with carrying case. The high-tech amenities feature a special fabric that blocks micro-toxins and "allows the health conscious traveler to rest easier in flight." Know what, folks? I have to agree. How clean do you really think those recycled pillows and blankets are? I have seen people sit on them, wrap their feet in them, change babies' diapers on them and who knows what else! Is this something you want to snuggle up to? Although they tend to be rarities these days, if that blanket or pillow is not wrapped in plastic, think first before you get too comfortable, whether in First Class or Economy...or BYOBAP!

