

EPISODE 25

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:05.4] IP: On this episode of AvTalk, we get an update on the investigation into the crash of Saratov Airlines Flight 703. Two airlines suffer engine incidents. We explain why London City Airport closed for a day and we learn once and for all how to use a METAR.

Hello and welcome to episode 25 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here as always with —

[0:00:29.1] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Hello.

[0:00:30.8] IP: And we begin the show on a very somber note. This weekend ended the 440-day streak of a non-fatal airplane crash.

[0:00:45.1] JR: Jet-powered aircraft.

[0:00:45.4] IP: Jet-powered commercial aircraft. Yeah, we have to be specific, but it was —

[0:00:48.8] JR: Just a couple of caveats.

[0:00:48.6] IP: But it was one of the longest streaks, if not the modern streak in modern history.

[0:00:53.3] JR: It was the longest streak. Yeah.

[0:00:55.3] IP: A Saratov Airlines Flight 703 crashed not long after takeoff from Moscow headed towards Orsk, which is southeast of Moscow. Unfortunately, no one on board survived and the Russian authorities released a preliminary set of data this morning that pointed towards some icing conditions that may have contributed to the crash.

[0:01:23.4] JR: Right. But as with air incidents like this, we don't know that they will —

[0:01:27.5] IP: Very preliminary info.

[0:01:31.4] JR: They will, in due course, could take years. They'll do their investigation. They'll figure out what happened, and as we know from year's past, it's never just one single thing that causes an accident. So we'll have to wait and see what the authorities say caused this, and I'm almost going to guarantee it wasn't just icing. It never is.

[0:01:51.6] IP: Yeah, there's never just one factor, of course, but we will see as it comes out. It was operated an Antonov An-148, which is a twin-engine aircraft. This particular one was delivered in 2010 to Rossiya stored in early 2017 and then picked up Saratov. Not an elderly aircraft by any stretch of the imagination.

[0:02:16.4] JR: I was following some tweets from John Astrow who we've had on the show a few times and he had noted this particular airframe in the past that had some significant issues, but I guess that's really kind of the case with all early model production runs of a new airframe though.

[0:02:31.9] IP: Right. I mean, anytime you build a new plane, the early models have issues. I mean, we've seen that with even brand new planes, like the 787, A380 and all of those have their issues on the first couple of production models.

[0:02:48.2] JR: Right. As of now, the airline has grounded the remainder of its An-148 fleet as they look to figure out what happened. So stay tuned and we'll pass it along as soon as the authorities figure out what happened.

[0:03:02.6] IP: What is breaking news as we're recording this, a United Airlines flight, flight 1175, landed in Honolulu from San Francisco missing part of its engine cowling from —

[0:03:18.1] JR: A good chunk of the right engine.

[0:03:19.4] IP: The pictures that we've seen so far. Obviously, we'll see more pictures soon to find out exactly how much of the engine is missing. If any of the actual engine is missing at all. But some very serious looking pictures came out of that from passengers on board.

[0:03:35.9] JR: Yeah. I mean, we're seeing these pictures and videos just out in the last not even half hour, and the video we see of the vibration of the wing and the fuselage, I guess, was taken before the engine was fully show down. It's pretty intense.

[0:03:48.9] IP: Yeah, it does not — Yes, significant. Intense is I think a good way to put it. But the flight landed safely in Honolulu. So that's good. And obviously there will be an investigation to accompany this incident as well, and we'll keep everyone apprised of that situation, but we will put some information in the show notes that shows those pictures and video.

So I think all the incident news we have for now, I hope.

[0:04:18.1] JR: I mean, there's the Delta incident from like 18 seconds ago.

[0:04:21.4] IP: Yes, the Delta 55 in Lagos returned after experiencing what Delta is terming an engine issue, and did passengers evacuate on slides or were they —

[0:04:34.7] JR: Yup, slides on the runway.

[0:04:35.2] IP: Okay, five customers reporting non-critical injuries. So it's been an eventful half hour.

[0:04:45.0] JR: Yeah. Don't really have any idea what happened with the Delta flight other than a non-specified engine issue, but it must have been pretty damn severe for them to basically not even leave the pattern at the airport and land less than 10 minutes after taking off with that much fuel on board. They're flying from Lagos back to Atlanta. So that's an extremely heavy landing. Yeah.

[0:05:05.9] IP: Yeah. So that is something we'll also be following and we'll have more on all of these issues in the next episode. So hopefully no more incidents today.

[0:05:18.0] JR: No.

[0:05:18.5] IP: An incident that happened over the weekend that has an interesting twist to it is London City Airport was closed and it was —

[0:05:27.3] JR: Over a day, right?

[0:05:27.7] IP: It was closed for over a day to flights, because as part of a planned construction project near the airport at dock area, they found an unexploded World War II bomb.

[0:05:44.7] JR: Pretty scary, I guess, if you're the construction guy and digging a hole on the ground and suddenly, "Oh, look! An unexploded bomb in the ground."

[0:05:52.4] IP: Yeah! I mean, in Europe, it happens, I don't want to say regularly, but it's not uncommon.

[0:06:00.6] JR: I mean, it kind of does. It happened just this past summer in Berlin. They had to shut the airport down for quite a while and actually have long haul flights out of the old airport while they diffuse the bomb out on the field in Berlin, and it seems to happen about every six months or so.

[0:06:21.0] IP: So they found this particular ordnance and they, I guess, loaded it on to a barge and shipped it off for disposal, and the airport is back open. But that was METAR listed operational disruptions — Or not METAR, the NOTAM listed operational disruptions.

[0:06:40.4] JR: That is quite the disruption.

[0:06:41.6] IP: So I've got METAR on the brain because we're going to talk about METARs a little bit later in the show.

[0:06:46.3] JR: Spoiler alert.

[0:06:47.3] IP: We'll get there.

[0:06:48.1] JR: But it happens, and some interesting stuff happened when London City was closed. The British Airway's Baby Bus, the A318 that shuttles between JFK and London City, all business class, diverted to Gatwick. Who is it? CityJet? Who was operating for — Aer Lingus operated [inaudible 0:07:05.5] Southend Airport, which is like — Can you even consider that, London, at that point?

[0:07:10.2] IP: I mean, it's one of those things where they tack on London to the name so they get people —

[0:07:14.4] JR: London-ish.

[0:07:15.2] IP: Yeah, London-ish.

[0:07:16.6] JR: But for the most part of the bulk of the flights were just straight up canceled.

[0:07:21.4] IP: Yeah. Stansted took some flights. Southend took some flights. Gatwick took, I think, one flight, and there was another airport that escapes me at the moment that also took a handful of flights. But yeah, most everything was just canceled for the day.

[0:07:37.5] JR: We should take bets on the next airport that will have this issue, because it seems to rotate around. It's never just one airport.

[0:07:43.8] IP: I don't know if that's something that we should bet on.

[0:07:46.2] JR: No, maybe not.

[0:07:47.6] IP: What we should talk about next instead of betting on which airports will find unexploded ordnance. Lufthansa got a new livery.

[0:07:57.5] JR: It did.

[0:07:58.8] IP: I take it that you're not a fan.

[0:08:00.8] **JR:** I'm undecided.

[0:08:01.7] **IP:** Okay. All right. That's fair.

[0:08:04.5] **JR:** I need to see it in person.

[0:08:05.3] **IP:** Yes, I missed my opportunity over the weekend to see it in person, and it was here —

[0:08:10.2] **JR:** Unbelievable. Come on!

[0:08:12.5] **IP:** I know. I'm a bad AV geek.

[0:08:13.6] **JR:** I did too.

[0:08:14.8] **IP:** Yeah. I was going to say, it went to New York too. So far they have painted one 747-DABYA.

[0:08:23.3] **JR:** That would be a 747-8I for those looking.

[0:08:26.8] **IP:** Correct, and there's an A321 that is also painted, registered DAISP, and those are painted in the new livery flying around on their regular routes and they're supposed to start painting more aircraft. They won't paint any aircraft proactively, which I thought was interesting.

[0:08:50.1] **JR:** It is interesting. So when their normal paint cycles come up.

[0:08:53.6] **IP:** Yeah, so when —

[0:08:54.8] **JR:** It's going to take forever.

[0:08:55.9] **IP:** Like 100 years or something like that.

[0:08:58.7] **JR:** That seems exaggerated, but I don't have a proof to back that up.

[0:09:00.3] IP: Maybe I'm exaggerating for a fact, but not the A350 that's being delivered Thursday, but the next one I believe, which is coming to the airline in March will be the first A350 to where the new livery. That will be interesting to see.

[0:09:16.3] JR: So I'm still torn on it. I feel like it is a bland. It's just white on the fuselage and you got the blue logo on the tail, but they could have done with a splash of yellow somewhere. Someone, I don't remember who on Twitter, mocked up the crane logo where just outer circle of it was yellow, but it added a lot of pop to it. But as it is now, it's pretty bland. Again, I still have to see it in person. There are some people out there who are still unhappy with American's new livery, even though a lot of people have come around over the, I guess, years at this point now. But we'll see if that happens with Lufthansa. But as of right now I am firmly undecided.

[0:09:58.6] IP: It will be interesting to see. I'm kind of with you in the fact that I don't dislike it, but I feel like they missed an opportunity.

[0:10:08.4] JR: I just don't understand also why. Why a new livery? Why a new branding? They're so well-known.

[0:10:14.9] IP: You could argue the same about American's new — I mean, obviously they had to start painting the planes because they were taking delivery.

[0:10:21.1] JR: Exactly American had a reason.

[0:10:23.4] IP: But they didn't have to rebrand — I mean, they could have just modified the livery and the logo and things like that. I mean, there's that argument to be made, but with Lufthansa I just feel like they missed an opportunity. I don't dislike it. I mean, I think it looks good. I just feel like they could have done more.

[0:10:44.2] JR: Yeah. Nothing to me strikes me special or unique. It's just white, a touch of blue and that's it.

[0:10:52.3] IP: Yeah. I mean, maybe it will grow on us and we'll be talking about this in a few years going — What airline is next?

[0:11:03.4] JR: Air France.

[0:11:03.4] IP: Well, we talked about Air France — What? In like the second episode, and I made a push for that horse emblem to take a bigger role.

[0:11:15.2] JR: That would be great.

[0:11:15.5] IP: I'm telling you, I think that's something they could really do well. So Lufthansa has got their A321 painted. They've got their 747 painted. So let's go with A321 and 747 news. Happy birthday to the 747 this week.

[0:11:34.0] JR: Hooray!

[0:11:34.2] IP: 49 years from February 9th.

[0:11:37.4] JR: [inaudible 0:11:37.8] a day over 40.

[0:11:40.6] IP: It starting to go a little gray in the top.

[0:11:44.3] JR: Yeah. So days from passenger service are certainly numbered.

[0:11:50.0] IP: Yeah, but they got a recent — I mean, this thing is going to be flying for a hundred years. UPS just recently ordered, I think it was 14 more.

[0:11:59.3] JR: Yeah, a bit of an add-on. They only very recently took their first, but I guess they liked what they saw.

[0:12:03.5] IP: So 14 more 747-8's. So cargo, obviously, but that will keep the production line open longer and it will keep the plane in the air longer, and that's good for the 747.

[0:12:14.6] JR: Yeah, I'm good for the people who make it too.

[0:12:17.0] IP: Well, there's that.

[0:12:17.6] JR: But it's still to the point where if you're looking to fly one as a passenger, your options are quite limited these days and shrinking by the day.

[0:12:26.7] IP: So A321 news. Airbus did a reverse Limburg today. Took off from Le Bourget in the A321LR, headed for JFK, because I don't think you can land at [inaudible 0:12:41.0] field anymore, at least with an A321.

[0:12:44.4] JR: It's a mall? The parking lots are pretty big, so you can probably make it work, but I wouldn't recommend it.

[0:12:49.2] IP: If you had a [inaudible 0:12:50.1] and you could do it.

[0:12:52.2] JR: Yeah, there's a plaque somewhere in the mall commemorating the flight, but you probably shouldn't land a new plane there. It probably won't go well.

[0:12:59.1] IP: So it just landed in New York not long ago. It's taxing around the airfield at JFK, because what landing in New York wouldn't be — It wouldn't be proper if they didn't make them taxi all around the entire airport for a tour.

[0:13:12.7] JR: Right. I mean, they proved that it could land at JFK with enough fuel, but they haven't proved yet that it could get to the gate at JFK without running out of fuel. That's the real test.

[0:13:22.0] IP: It's going to be 200 people out there just pushing behind the wings.

[0:13:26.1] JR: Yeah, taxing at JFK is not great, but it made it.

[0:13:29.8] IP: It made it. Yup.

[0:13:30.9] JR: It mimics almost what Bombardier did — I think last year, they flew London City to JFK nonstop to prove that it could take over the A318, the baby bus. It seems like Europe to JFK is the really proof point for your narrow body Transatlantic operation.

[0:13:51.0] IP: Exactly. I think the two business centers, whether it's Paris or London to New York, the way that people measure it. And we had a lot of push back when we talked about Norwegian and their Transatlantic flight. Obviously, a flight to Dublin is also across the Atlantic, and therefore Transatlantic. But the standard unit of measurement has been New York to London.

[0:14:22.2] JR: Or if you're [inaudible 0:14:22.7], the standard of measurement could be Iceland to San Francisco.

[0:14:26.4] IP: We posted this on Twitter and somebody made a comment that [inaudible 0:14:30.4] was going to try and use the A321LR for [inaudible 0:14:33.3] to Australia.

[0:14:35.2] JR: I mean, if you have to keep the load light enough, sure, why not?

[0:14:38.5] IP: I thought that was funny, and you never know, they might do that.

[0:14:42.7] JR: Please don't.

[0:14:42.8] IP: No, they won't.

[0:14:43.9] JR: I've been seeing a lot of ads on Instagram for flights. Was it Primera Air starting up service to New York from Europe and they've had to push it back a few times, because they don't have their A321LR's yet, but there's a lot of interest in those little planes going big flights.

[0:15:01.7] IP: Yeah. I mean, the idea behind the A321LR is basically that it's not a straight replacement for the 757200, but it is a replacement.

[0:15:13.4] JR: It is more than it is not.

[0:15:14.5] IP: Right. I mean, you're not getting the exact same performance figures out of it, but it's something that can slot into what would be a 757200's job. I mean, certainly the client performance is going to be incredibly different.

[0:15:32.1] JR: Yeah, it would be hard to match the 757's Corvette-like performance.

[0:15:37.4] IP: Versus the A321s — What's the opposite of a Corvette?

[0:15:41.7] JR: Dodge Neon.

[0:15:42.7] IP: Okay. We'll go with that.

[0:15:43.8] JR: Yeah, that will do.

[0:15:45.1] IP: We're A321 fans. We podcast at FR24, and you can tell us why we're wrong about that if you're an A321 fan.

[0:15:55.3] JR: Are we wrong though? Because I'm pretty sure we're not.

[0:15:56.6] IP: I don't think we are, but if you think we are, please tell us why. I would be curious to know. But it will be interesting. A lot of people have said, "I'm not going across the ocean in a single isle aircraft."

[0:16:07.2] JR: That's stupid.

[0:16:09.1] IP: My whole thing is — And we've had this conversation before and we could have briefly again, but I mean if the aircraft is being designed for long journeys, I would hope that the airlines are taking that into account in their cabin designs.

[0:16:26.4] JR: Yeah, I mean it's up to the individual airline. WOW Air is not going to equip its A321 Neo LR's in a fantastic form. So no matter what it is, it's going to be barebones on the inside, but if you get an airline like a Jet Blue or Delta or whatever, they're going to get that aircraft out to the specs of their wide body aircraft. So in some ways, especially operators that

also operate [inaudible 0:16:50.8] 777's or whatever, it's going to be probably more comfortable than a wide body aircraft, if it's kitted out correctly.

[0:16:57.8] IP: Yeah, and I was trying to follow this line of reasoning, but they were saying that they're not going to do that, because it only has one aisle, so you can't walk around, and that's what I said. It was unclear to me what turning radius they required to walk. So perhaps they had never heard of turning around. But it seems to me that people are kind of bending over backwards to say, "Well, I'm not going to fly on a single aisle aircraft on long distance."

[0:17:22.7] JR: When you think of single aisle, you think of like a Southwest 737 with your like 31-inch peach seats, or 32, no entertainment, no power, maybe Wi-Fi, like just not — It's a good experience, but not one you'd want to sit in for a 10-hour flight, but there's nothing stopping an airline from putting in long-haul seats and entertainment and power and all the things that make a long distance cabin, a long distance on a narrow body aircraft.

[0:17:49.6] IP: Yeah, exactly.

[0:17:50.5] JR: Yeah, I mean just look at — Who was it? Fly Dubai took their 737 matched with full flat beds upfront. So even in business class, there's nothing stopping an airline from making the difference non-existent.

[0:18:02.1] IP: No. I mean, American operates those three class A321s between New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. I mean that's a proven nice product.

[0:18:15.2] JR: Yeah, I'd rather be on that than any one of their 777s.

[0:18:18.3] IP: This is true. They used to run the 767 200s on those routes. I mean, those were —

[0:18:25.2] JR: Those were fun. Old School comfort on that plane.

[0:18:28.1] IP: It was like sitting in your grandfather's chair.

[0:18:32.8] JR: I don't hate those old, super reclining seats. Norwegians still kind of has it, because they didn't opt for full flat premium cabin, but I love those seats.

[0:18:44.8] IP: Yeah. I mean, they were comfortable.

[0:18:47.7] JR: They still are.

[0:18:48.2] IP: I mean, all you need is like a think of hard candy and some plastic on the seats to get that, really, like grandparent's house experience.

[0:18:56.2] JR: Yeah. Don't ever remove the plastic. We might have to return it to the store one day.

[0:19:01.5] IP: I mean, can you do that with airplane seats? I wonder.

[0:19:05.4] JR: Like 30 years later, bring it back to the Being factory and say, "I want a new one. This one is damaged."

[0:19:11.6] IP: What happened? I took the plastic off.

[0:19:14.5] JR: We flew it for 400,000 miles last week. So, you know —

[0:19:19.3] IP: Exactly. Oh! Should we talk about Singapore?

[0:19:24.3] JR: What's there to talk about?

[0:19:24.8] IP: Are you ready? I'm going to wrap up the entire Singapore Air Show in 5 seconds.

[0:19:29.1] JR: Ready? Go!

[0:19:29.7] IP: No one bought any planes. All right.

[0:19:31.2] JR: The end. What did happen?

[0:19:33.8] IP: I don't know.

[0:19:34.1] JR: Anything?

[0:19:35.4] IP: I mean, as far as like commercial aviation and things that we normally talk about, not really.

[0:19:40.3] JR: Disappointing.

[0:19:40.9] IP: I mean, we always like to — I mean, has Singapore been a jumping off point in years past? If it has, I don't really remember it.

[0:19:50.8] JR: No. I don't think so. I'm even looking through my email inbox to see if I get any press releases related to this show, and there's nothing.

[0:19:59.2] IP: No. I mean, an exciting and hopefully worthwhile air show for some. Just not a whole lot of news to come out of it.

[0:20:07.6] JR: Yeah, I got nothing. Singapore's first 787-10 comes soon.

[0:20:12.6] IP: Yeah, in March, but that's tangentially related. Yeah.

[0:20:14.2] JR: But that's unrelated to the air show. Yeah, and some other uninteresting stuff, but no major importance.

[0:20:21.8] IP: And it was this morning, because the air show area was under construction. So there were no commercial displays, like the A350 1000 was there, but it was just on static display.

[0:20:34.7] JR: That stinks.

[0:20:35.8] IP: Yeah.

[0:20:36.2] JR: Here is something that's of minor interest. During the show, Boeing announced that the 737 Max 10 reached firm configuration.

[0:20:45.7] IP: They also rolled out the Max 7, but was that during the show or just around —

[0:20:51.3] JR: I think that was before. Either way, all 18 [inaudible 0:20:56.0]. Super happy. Let's see, the 737 Max 10, which is a stretched fuselage 66 inches longer than the Max 9. Blah-blah-blah. Up to 230 passengers. Good God! That's it.

[0:21:10.6] IP: What's kind of tip bar is that thing going to need?

[0:21:14.5] JR: Something made out of titanium, or I don't know, but long plane is long.

[0:21:20.3] IP: New orders that got firmed up not at the — I'm not at the Singapore Air Show, but recently, which keeps the A380 line alive for a little bit longer is the Emirates order for what? 36 new A380?

[0:21:34.6] JR: That sounds right.

[0:21:35.7] IP: And that was announced a while ago, but this week it was firmed.

[0:21:41.5] JR: That was at the Dubai Air Show I think, right?

[0:21:44.2] IP: No. No, because remember they had the books all ready to sign everything and we saw pictures of the signing books and then they couldn't get it done, so it was after the show. Now last week they firmed up the orders. They actually said, "Here are some money. We're going to buy these planes."

[0:22:01.8] JR: Dot the I's, cross the T's.

[0:22:03.6] IP: There you go. That's is a done deal and the A380 lives to be put on its death watch another day.

[0:22:14.1] JR: Speaking of A380 death watch, the worst movie ever made. Well, the second — What was it? Singapore A380? Found its way at Tarmac [inaudible 0:22:27.2]. Where the heck were they?

[0:22:29.4] IP: They're in Tarbes.

[0:22:30.3] JR: Sure. Whatever that is. That is not the second retired or I guess stored technically A380, because it will eventually find its way back into service, so somebody somewhere.

[0:22:41.3] IP: Yeah, this one is for onward storage.

[0:22:45.8] JR: A lease returned for storage. It will fly again one day, but it's a lease, and Singapore doesn't want it anymore.

[0:22:53.3] IP: Yeah. They have two locations. The A380 at Tarbes, which is in France, and there's Teruel, which is in Spain. Those are the two big air craft bone yards/storage facilities in Europe that often see a lot of heavy action, like A340s going to retirement and things like that.

[0:23:14.7] JR: Speaking of A340 retirement. An A340 was just unretired.

[0:23:18.8] IP: That's right! A very Virgin Atlantic thank you.

[0:23:22.7] JR: We forgot about that. Virgin Atlantic had slowly been retiring its A340 600 fleet. They had retired the 300s a couple of years ago at this point, but due to issues with the 787-9s Rolls Royce Trent 1000 engines. Did I get that right? I think I got that right.

[0:23:43.3] IP: Yeah, I believe so.

[0:23:44.0] JR: They have had to ground a few 787s and in the meantime they have acquired some off lease Air Berlin A33000s, because Air Berlin ain't using them anymore, but they need

even more lifts, so they reactivated an A34600 that had been stored in 2015 and gave it a neat paintjob. What's that say again?

[0:24:08.2] IP: A very Virgin Atlantic thank you. So employees, I believe, is who they are thinking.

[0:24:14.9] JR: I've been told it's a standby aircraft. So it won't be in service every day, but it has the same interior. It has all the other A340s, minus Wi-Fi, unfortunately, but they will only be pushing it into service when needed kind of. Just as a one-off spare.

[0:24:31.7] IP: Yeah, and they're slowly painting the X-Berlin A330s. They're getting out of the hold Air Berlin livery and putting them into the Virgin Atlantic livery. So I think the most recent one was the one they're — You know how Virgin names their aircrafts and the ones that's being named after Mick Jagger.

[0:24:54.1] JR: Right. That's all because of the engine issues with the 7879, that particular engine. I guess we should also mention at the same time, wasn't there some news about the A320 Neo engines?

[0:25:06.9] IP: Yeah. This is kind of a continuing saga, and it's really affected the Indian operators of the A320 Neo, and now they updated the engine. So it's like the new. They had engine issues, then the engine issues kind of started going away, and then they revised part of the engine, and that part had issues, and so now they've grounded a bunch of the A320 Neo's. That was a very poor winding explanation. I'm sorry, listeners.

[0:25:43.2] JR: Well, that kind of caught you off guard.

[0:25:46.5] IP: There is that.

[0:25:48.2] JR: But yeah, it's definitely not just the 787 [inaudible 0:25:51.2] issues these days, because the A320 Neo still is lingering issues grounding big chunks of the worldwide fleet are kind of getting old at this point.

[0:26:02.1] IP: Yeah. I mean, they'll tell you that anytime there's a new engine and a long-term technical development and things like that, you're going to have engine issues, but it does seem to be getting a bit old and really affecting the plans of airlines.

[0:26:17.9] JR: It's been enough of an issue that airlines are rethinking their 320 Neo orders and either not placing them at all or in the case of a couple of airlines, even like Jet Blue, converting Neo orders to CO orders and just taking the current engine option.

[0:26:33.8] IP: Yeah. I mean, we'll obviously keep following this to see how it impacts and why kind of — Because if I'm Airbus, how do you deal with that?

[0:26:44.7] JR: You blame the engine manufacturer and say, "It ain't our problem. We don't make the engine."

[0:26:47.6] IP: Whoa! Sure, but you still got to get people to buy your planes.

[0:26:50.3] JR: Yeah. It's a problem. If I were selling these airplanes and someone asked me, "The engines don't work." I don't really what I would say in reply to that. But I hear you have a rant that you want to go on.

[0:27:03.0] IP: It's not so much a rant.

[0:27:05.4] JR: It's a rant.

[0:27:05.8] IP: Well, yeah.

[0:27:06.8] JR: Let's hear it.

[0:27:08.6] IP: So I have an issue, and I feel —

[0:27:10.7] JR: Rant. You have a rant.

[0:27:12.3] IP: I have a rant. Earlier this week, a Southwest 737 was reported to have skidded off the runway. Now, when I say skidded off the runway, my mind instantly turns to it was going very fast, because it was on the runway. Skidded means something very bad happened and it went off the runway, which is generally between 150 and 200 feet wide. So it's not a small place.

It turns out that this particular 737 had not skidded off the runway. It had exited the usable portion of the taxi way, which means the area inside the painted lines. No part of the aircraft ever left paved surface, and before anyone had a chance to ever look at the facts here, Twitter was off the races. News agencies were reporting an airplane off the runway, and then by the time everyone walks it back to, "No. Actually the plane had a little bit of ice and it went off the centerline in the taxi way and came close to going into the grass at .1 miles per hour."

[0:28:23.6] JR: .1?

[0:28:25.0] IP: Exactly.

[0:28:25.5] JR: Such velocity.

[0:28:26.6] IP: Exactly. I mean, my whole thing about this is the words mean something, and the whole skidded off runway — It gets back to when news organizations take passenger eye witness accounts at face value without doing any fact checking, and that's what really makes me upset.

[0:28:47.5] JR: Yeah. You got a lot of people covering this industry that don't know anything about this industry, because their just general news assignment, beat reporters and they're assigned this, so they, "Okay. That's not where it's supposed to be. Therefore skidded off the runway and oh my god. What a horror."

[0:29:04.9] IP: And there were passengers on Twitter and news organizations go on Twitter right away, and this is something we do as well, but we have the ability to kind of look at things and go, "Okay. That doesn't sound right. Those words don't go together. This doesn't seem right. Let's look at the data," and things like that.

But it bothers me that without any type of further reporting when people take these eyewitness statements, they're often contradictory and just run with them and then a day later say, "Oh, well. That's not exactly what happened.

[0:29:40.7] JR: But by then the damage is done.

[0:29:42.7] IP: That was kind of weak for a rant, but it's just something that I'm saying that I think I wish news organizations [inaudible 0:29:49.7] and it's something that we try to do on a daily basis, where getting the terminology right, getting the phrasing right and getting — I mean, most of all, the facts right and using the data available.

[0:30:01.9] JR: That was a solid rant.

[0:30:03.5] IP: Thank you very much.

[0:30:04.5] JR: Get your information from someone who knows what they're talking about. Speaking of someone who knows what they're talking about, we have a new good segue.

[0:30:11.4] IP: We have a new thing.

[0:30:12.8] JR: I thank you.

[0:30:14.3] IP: This was all Jason's idea and I —

[0:30:17.7] JR: I did a thing. You can't say I don't do anything for this show, but I did think.

[0:30:21.9] IP: Jason's done one thing for this show in 25 episodes.

[0:30:27.0] JR: Yeah, that's accurate.

[0:30:28.5] IP: So, Jason, in your infinite wisdom, I really appreciate this. We started in episode in 23. We said we were going to start doing glossary terms, and as it was pointed out, Jason

and I generally know what we're talking about, but if you want to really understand something, we're not your guys. It's best to ask the experts. Luckily, we actually know some experts. So we turned to pilot extraordinaire and explainer of all things in the air, Capt. Ken Hoke, who flies for a

—
[0:31:05.5] JR: Don't give it away. We can't say it.

[0:31:07.1] IP: Drably colored package express airline.

[0:31:11.8] JR: Yes. That will do nicely.

[0:31:13.0] IP: So ponder that, and he has agreed to on a regular basis answer questions about terminology that you might hear, that you might see, that might confuse you if you're on an airplane going, "What is that? What did I just see?" If you ever have any questions about what you're seeing, what you're hearing and something you may not understand, send us an email, podcast@fr24.com and we will ask Ken to provide us with an answer, or if he can't, we'll find somebody who can and we're going to make expert answers a regular thing rather than Jason and I just kind of not making it up, but doing our best.

[0:31:55.8] JR: Yeah. Our sincere appreciation to Ken. You can find him on Twitter, @AeroSavvy, and also you can head to his own blog, aerosavvy.com, he would much appreciate it. But why don't we transition over to him. What's our term of the episode?

[0:32:18.3] IP: So we kick this off with, as I mentioned earlier, METAR. So we're going to let Ken explain what METAR is, what it's used for and why everyone, not necessarily in aviation, might find it useful.

KH: METAR is a French acronym for —

[0:32:45.0] G: Message d'observation météorologique régulier pour l'aviation.

[0:32:49.4] KH: Thank you, Siri. It translates to regular weather observation message for aviation. Some countries have adopted the name meteorological aerodrome report, but everyone just calls them METARs.

METAR is a coded format that contains the current weather conditions at airports and weather stations. Weather observations are made about every hour by humans or automated equipment. The observations are then coded into METAR format. It was developed back in the 1960s when teletypes were used for sending data. Bandwidth was a big deal back then, so METARs had to be short.

Pilots used METARs for flight planning. We also get current METARs while we're in flight so we know what's going on at the destination. When your pilot tells you the weather before you land, he's reading it right from the latest METAR. Meteorologists use METARs to help with reporting and forecasting.

A raw METAR looks like a scrambled mess of letters and numbers. With a little practice, they're not difficult to read. Every METAR has several basic items; location and time of observation, wind speed and direction, surface visibility, weather type. Two letter abbreviations are used for different weather types. There are over two dozen abbreviations for things like rain, snow, thunderstorms, even volcanic ash. I don't have a sound effect for volcanic ash.

Next, the METAR shows cloud cover and heights, temperature and dew point and the local altimeter setting. The end of the METAR usually has a few remarks. They might include things like runway conditions or what time a thunderstorm began. METARs aren't just for pilots and meteorologists. If you like following the weather, METARs are a great resource. There are several METAR apps available. The nice thing about most of these apps is you don't have to understand the METAR format. The apps decode everything into plain English so they're easy to read. If you'd like to try decoding METARs, I'll give Ian and Jason a few links to include in the show notes.

Looks like my airplane is about ready, so it's time for me to check my METARs and fly out of here.

[0:35:23.0] IP: I thought that that was an excellent first bit of glossary information.

[0:35:30.0] JR: Yeah, even some added sound effects for that extra touch, which is something we don't have the capability to do that.

[0:35:39.0] IP: Well, I mean, we do. I think I just don't trust you to choose the sound effects is what I'm saying.

[0:35:43.1] JR: Yeah, although I'd still don't know what the sound effect for volcanic ash would be like. Don't really know what he could possibly have done there.

[0:35:53.1] IP: Let me tell you this. I don't want to ever find out what volcanic ash sounds like.

[0:35:57.0] JR: No.

[0:35:57.0] IP: Let's just leave it at there.

[0:35:59.7] JR: Yeah. Excellent job. We're going to hope to make this a regular thing. Let us know if you have any terms that you would like to find by Ken, our now expert. One of these days we're going to have him do air speed versus ground speed, and even he said, "This one's going to take a little while." That's a bit of explaining. So we're going to start it off simple and ramp it up.

[0:36:22.0] IP: Yeah. I mean, we promise not to turn this into a physics podcast.

[0:36:26.4] JR: What is gravity?

[0:36:27.4] IP: Yeah, exactly. But we'll do our best to kind of keep it interesting, keep it lively, but also give you the information that you need to hopefully understand everything by the end. So a great start to what I think is a great thing and I'm really grateful to Ken for doing this.

[0:36:47.6] JR: Yes, as am I. Thanks a lot, Ken.

[0:36:50.2] IP: We have a lot to follow up on in our next episode. So we will do that, but we will —

[0:36:57.2] JR: We're going to find out what happened in Singapore.

[0:36:58.9] IP: We're going to find out what happened in Singapore. We'll find out what happened in Honolulu with United. We'll find out what happened in Lagos with Delta. We'll keep abreast of the Saratov Airline's crash investigation and whatever else happens in the next couple of next. But until then, I am Ian Petchenik, here as always with the sound effected —

[0:37:21.9] JR: Jason Robinowitz. Thank you. Yeah, let us know if you know what volcanic ash sounds like.

[0:37:26.6] IP: There you go. Thanks for listening.

[END]