

EPISODE 223

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[00:00:07] IP: Hello, and welcome to Episode 228 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[00:00:16] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Happy Wednesday, Ian.

[00:00:20] IP: Happy Wednesday, Jason. How are you, sir?

[00:00:22] JR: I'm good. I had to think about what day of the week it was, because we almost recorded on Tuesday again.

[00:00:26] IP: Yes, we've been switching it up the past couple of weeks. But we're on the Wednesday schedule today. Then, a programming note, we will not be on the Wednesday schedule next week, because I will be on vacation.

[00:00:39] JR: I didn't know we allow that anymore.

[00:00:41] IP: I mean, it's short and it's fast, not very far away. But I'm taking what I can get. We will not have a new show next week. But we'll have a little recap of how things have gone so far this year, like we do. I think we did the same thing last August. It's the week off. So, if you're going on vacation, listening to the podcast, hopefully you can enjoy the week off as well.

But this week, we have a lot of news to get through first before any vacations happen. We begin with the closure of Niger's airspace in the Sahel in Africa, and the importance of this for commercial aviation is not necessarily the closure of the airspace, though that is significant for the variety of flights that do operate to Niamey. And the airspace closure follows a coup that took place at the end of July. The President has been placed under house arrest for the past few weeks, and the military has taken control of the country.

In the past few days, they closed the airspace because of the threat of the use of military force to undo the coup by eco loss countries, which are a collective of African states that are bringing military might to bear, possibly, to reverse the effects of the coup. So, in anticipation of any military use of force in Niger, the coup led government has closed of national airspace.

[00:02:13] JR: Well, I guess that's good. That's what – well, not what is going on is good. It's certainly not. But closing of airspace before any potential action occurs is what you want to see.

[00:02:26] IP: A prudent step for sure. As this impact commercial aviation, it makes it a whole lot more difficult to get between Southern Africa and Europe for the airlines that operate in that airspace.

[00:02:41] JR: Or Western Africa and the Middle East is a huge route as well. Though there was already a bit of a choke point there.

[00:02:50] IP: Right. So, the issue isn't the fact that Niger's airspace is close. It's the fact that Niger's airspace is closed in addition to Sudan, and Libya. Libya's airspace is open, but European airlines for the most part can fly in the Tripoli Fair. The US, Canada, France, UK, Germany, amongst others have said to their airlines, “No, you can't fly there. It's not safe.” And so, instead of flying the most direct route, through what would likely be Western Sudan, through Chad into Libya, they've had to route around Sudan and Libya, and go through Niger.

Now, that Niger's airspace is closed, all routes move even further west, or further east, if you're going to fly through Ethiopia, up through the Red Sea and across Egypt, depending on which way you want to go with things. But that puts pressure on those two routes that are left now, as far as the most efficient routes, which are not at all efficient, but it's the best, airlines can do at the moment.

[00:04:01] JR: Yes, and this happened rather suddenly. I think it was three nights ago at this point, maybe August 6th, I believe, or actually no, before that. August 6th, maybe? August 7th?

[00:04:12] IP: Yes, sixth.

[00:04:14] JR: A couple of days ago. It happened very suddenly. All the European airlines were happily flying their evening departure bank from South Africa or Central Africa up to Europe and suddenly a huge chunk of airspace closed and they had a bunch of decisions to make for flights. Could they continue on by making a very sudden left turn and deviate around the now closed airspace and up to Africa? Some flights were able to do that if they had enough fuel and the endurance to do that. Other flights planned to divert to somewhere in Ghana, or I think Nigeria, or other Western African countries gassed up and headed back north. Some flights canceled outright and some flights had the very unfortunate outcome of returning all the way back to their origin, of which there were a number of flights specifically, BA and its A380 had like another one of those epically long 13-hour flights to nowhere, where I think they had a couple of flights out of Cape Town and Johannesburg, which made it all the way up to the closed airspace. Had to turn around and go all the way back because at that point, there were issues of diversion airports were already overcrowded, and you can't just pop in A380 whenever you want to, unannounced, and be accommodated. Unfortunately, they had to return all the way to South Africa. Days of delay, real hassle for passengers. But I think they actually have two in the air right now from Joburg up to London. That's a lot of people to be moved.

[00:05:43] IP: I mean, just really unfortunate looking at the diversion point, especially for the BA A380 where they made it basically to the border, and were told, "No, sorry."

[00:05:54] JR: "Go away." And had the airspace been closed, maybe, let's say eight hours earlier, they could have probably just fueled up with a little extra fuel and gone around the runway, which is what they're doing today. They're basically flying off the western coast of Africa, and headed – it's a longer flight, but they're able to do that nonstop, but only because they're prepared to do that, with maybe a combination of maximum fuel for the aircraft and maybe even some weight restrictions, not as much cargo or not as many passengers don't know that. But I wouldn't be surprised.

[00:06:28] IP: We'll have to ask our A380 pilot friends to understand. I would assume that the aircraft can make that flight, no problem.

[00:06:34] JR: Yes, it's only 11 hours. It's not an outrageously long flight for that route, actually, not even all that much longer than a typical flight, which is about 10 and a half to 11. So,

sometimes it's even longer than that if they're hit by winds. It's just interesting that it's actually just not that much longer timewise. But if you're not planning to do it, and you are hundreds of miles east of where you now need to be, that's just enough fuel that you don't have to make it happen.

[00:07:02] IP: The big issue here was that they didn't have the fuel to make that diversion from where they were, which makes sense to me.

[00:07:09] JR: Yes, hopefully this is not a long-term closure because the airspace up there in Northern Africa is looking quite consolidated in an unfortunate way these days.

[00:07:19] IP: Not good. Not good at all. Speaking of not good, Jason, the NTSB released its final report on the incident in Boston in February, when a Learjet 60 departed without clearance in front of a landing, JetBlue E190. We didn't learn a whole lot more from the final report. There was no mitigating factors that made this make more sense. It was just the Lear 60 didn't listen to the controller, and departed without clearance as the E190 was coming in.

What we did learn was just how close those aircraft came. Well, we knew how close they came in an intellectual way. We have the data. What we have now is a still photograph taken from a video that the jumpseat occupant of the E190 was filming that shows the Lear crossing in front of the flight deck. And wow, is it close.

[00:08:24] JR: Yes, unfortunately, it's only a still frame from a video which I'm sure we will never be able to see the video, because they'd probably have to bleep the whole audio out of it. I can imagine that the words being said are probably not suitable for this particular podcast.

[00:08:42] IP: Certainly not this podcast.

[00:08:43] JR: No, but I would really like to see that video. Again, kudos to the JetBlue crew, and especially the third occupant in the jumpseat for taking the very valuable video that we now those still frames out off because it's one thing to know an event happened, but it's another entirely to see it. It reminds me kind of the Air Canada incident in San Francisco a few years ago where yes, we knew something bad happened. But when the video came out, it was a whole

other level of comprehension of just out close things really were. In this case, it was a bit too close for anyone's comfort, especially if you're the jumpseat or in that E190. You know the Reddit thing? Praise the cameraman in this case for keeping the camera on the target there because it makes a hell of a still frame.

[00:09:30] IP: Yes. I mean, it's just incredible. The link is in the show notes, obviously. Please, go look at it, and then change pants as necessary after you examine this particular photograph. Yes, like Jason said, I doubt we'll ever see the video now that it's gone the way of an NTSB investigation. Certainly, it's locked away in a vault somewhere, but we'll see.

The FAA is warning of a very particular issue on the engines that power the 737 MAX. So, the LEAP-1B engine may or may not, depending on a set of very specific conditions. I have a problem with overheating the engine inlet while using the anti-icing feature in dry weather. If you do that in a very specific set of circumstances, it could blow the inlet away from the plane.

[00:10:23] JR: Yes, and as this report from AP says, we've seen what happens when there's uncontained failures of the engine like that. I don't even know if this would be an uncontained failure, because it's not a part of the engine itself. I guess, the interior of the engine, it's the inlet but it can of course cause decompression and hazard to passengers inside the aircraft if it pierces the airframe or the windows, which we saw with the Southwest accident a few years ago.

Not great. It seems there is no proof that this has ever happened in the lifespan of the 737 MAX so far, which is good, but it could happen, and it's having a material impact on the certification of the MAX 7 and MAX 10 which the latter of which, according to the **[inaudible 00:11:08]**, the air current is not expected before the middle of 2024 now, potentially, or in part, at least due to this safety issue. Things keep piling up for the certification timeline of that aircraft.

[00:11:20] IP: Yes. So, as Jason mentioned, this has never happened in flight. This particular issue was discovered during testing, and it happens in a very specific set of circumstances. But it's a serious enough problem that the FAA issued an Airworthiness Directive with a 15-day effective window. So normally, for these types of things, there's a window of public comment, where the manufacturer, airlines, maintenance personnel, operators, Jason, URI, anybody can

make a public comment to the government in support of the changes or criticizing the changes or suggesting modifications, which airlines often do when they are tasked with an Airworthiness Directive that will affect their operations. They'll often suggest specifications, corrections, modifications that either they think make more sense for their operations or clarify things, so that they're not doing work unnecessarily or so that they know that they're doing the right work.

This one goes into effect 15 days after publication. There is no 90-day public comment period. Fifteen days after publication, it is in effect. So, the FAA is seemingly taking this very seriously.

[00:12:37] JR: Which is good, I guess, that's a good thing that this has never been experienced in operation, and the FAA is ensuring that hopefully it never will happen in operation. It wouldn't make much sense to leave time for public comment here. Really don't need anyone commenting in the Federal Register. You know what, I don't like this. I think we should let the engine explode. That would be a weird take on the situation.

[00:13:03] IP: I wouldn't put it past somebody though. We did an episode a while ago and I'll see if I can go back and find that. Maybe we'll put that in a clip for next week. But we talked about some of the more interesting public comments that are received. Anytime there's a public comment, period.

[00:13:19] JR: Public comment on anything in that regard. It's not just on aviation stuff or aircraft stuff, public comment on anything is generally awful. It's terrible.

[00:13:28] IP: Low quality, shall we say? Quantity over quality, in essence. Sticking with the 737 MAX, we have for the first time, as first reported by Dominic Gates at The Seattle Times, a breakdown of the 737 MAX order backlog, and I'm not blown away by it. But I'm a little surprised by how these things break down. Jason, what was your take on it?

[00:13:54] JR: My take is, finally, I don't know why Boeing has always been so cagey about this stuff when Airbus every month list exactly what the orders and deliveries are by type. It doesn't just say A320. It tells me whether it's an A320, neo A321, ceo A321 LR or whatever, even an A318 is still listed. So, I am not shocked that of course most orders are for the 737 MAX 8. A little surprised that the nine is like a rounding error.

[00:14:25] IP: Yes, that's what I was taking a look at.

[00:14:26] JR: Three percent, just in the backlog, at least, I'm pretty sure United has many aircraft in operation, as there are in the backlog. But just 137 MAX 9s in the backlog, as opposed to 810 of the Max 10, combined with how many more? There's 344 of the MAX 8200 which is the higher capacity version of the MAX 8. Then, even the 700 has more orders which I think is just like a United – sorry, a southwest specific variant at this point.

[00:15:04] IP: Someone at United just went, “What?”

[00:15:06] JR: “What? When did we order that?” But, they have a lot of 700 NGs, so maybe one day. But yeah, the dash nine, I wouldn't have thought, given the success of the 900 ER, that the direct replacement for it would be such a, I don't even know what to call it. It's not a failure, but just, not success, I guess?

[00:15:25] IP: I guess what I'm thinking about here is, if it's the thing from contact where the guy goes, if you're going to – why not build to for twice the price. If you're going to take a 9, why not take a 10?

[00:15:38] JR: Sure, if it's ever certified and can operate, notwithstanding that concern.

[00:15:42] IP: A separate question –

[00:15:46] JR: But just thinking that there is a larger version of 737, I guess that makes sense. But it's just surprising to see that the 900ER, which is such a popular aircraft, especially here in the US with United and Delta, having hundreds of them. But I guess thinking outside of North America, it's not really that biggest success, is it?

[00:16:05] IP: Lion Air?

[00:16:06] JR: Lion Air, KLM? I honestly can't think of that many more airlines that operate the 900ER. Forget the non-ER version. I think that's solely United and Alaska, operating the non-ER

variant of the 900. Yes. I guess, come to think of it, there aren't that many 900ERs out there today, and the MAX 10, although it is not available at the moment, just makes more sense. Doesn't cost that much more to operate it probably, and you can almost certainly offset that with extra seats.

[00:16:37] IP: Yes. Let's stick with Boeing, shall we?

[00:16:39] JR: Sure. More good news?

[00:16:42] IP: I don't know what this is necessarily good news, or just news. Boeing has decided to stretch the 777-8 fuselage, the passenger version to match the freight versions fuselage length. So, they're adding three and a half feet to the passenger version of the 777-8 fuselage to make it the same as the freight one. This bumps the passenger capacity up in a two-class configuration to 395 and increases the range to 8,750 nautical miles up from 8,730. So, I think we can call it unloved. I mean, they have two dozen orders for the dash eight.

[00:17:32] JR: Yes, I'm actually trying to look up who has those orders now. I think it is Emirates, maybe?

[00:17:37] IP: Emirates.

[00:17:39] JR: Yes, not that popular of an aircraft. And this was supposed to be the direct replacement for the 300ER, the current airframe, that's I guess, no longer really in production.

[00:17:49] IP: Everybody's going bigger. So, 300 orders.

[00:17:52] JR: Seemingly very common thread between the topic we just discussed with the 73 and the 777x here. Again, unfortunately, this aircraft is not yet certified and ready to go. Maybe next year. But yes, nobody really wants to take the smaller aircraft.

[00:18:07] IP: And they're not small.

[00:18:10] JR: No, it is large. But in the grand scheme of things, it is the smaller version of the aircraft. And yes, it makes sense, I guess. This way, I haven't really read up on this topic, but I guess it lets them have a common fuselage for both the dash eight and the freighter, so – or at least the common length, so that just makes sense and makes me wonder why it wasn't the planned the whole time.

[00:18:32] IP: I'm still trying to figure out why it was a different length in the first place, and I haven't been able to find that, and that gives me something to do the rest of the week, and hopefully put it in the show notes by the time the show comes out on Friday, because somebody is going to ask that same question and we should have an answer for it.

Let us move on from Boeing and talk about a few low-cost airlines that are pretty much in similar boats, but not quite the same boat. We'll start with Spirit, which, after reporting their second quarter earnings, or first half earnings really, being hit by a triple whammy of changes in demand, summer weather, and air traffic control, unfortunateness. Then the Pratt & Whitney geared turbofan recall, they did not have a good second quarter. So, the changes in demand are one that we've talked about a little bit before, but the second quarter really came became apparent, because multiple airlines are talking about this. Spirit really impacted by the fact that people who are flying are choosing to fly further this year, or specifically this summer.

[00:19:42] JR: JetBlue had said the same thing as well.

[00:19:43] IP: Yes, exactly. Last summer. I think one of the big issues was people weren't really super ready to travel that far afield. People that would normally fly Spirit domestically, weren't necessarily ready to travel that far afield, but also Europe was such a disaster as far as being able to actually fly there without your travel plans being severely disrupted by staff shortages, long lines, missed flights, et cetera, that it wasn't really that big of a deal last year. But this year, people are saying, “Yes, we'll go to Europe. We'll fly, instead of flying to Florida, we'll fly to Europe.”

[00:20:24] JR: Yes, even in Amsterdam seems to have figured stuff out, and I haven't seen really any images or videos out of Europe this year, where lines are just five hours long. So, things are, at least right now pretty stable.

[00:20:36] IP: Lessons were learned and actions were taken. So, Spirit sees a large hole where they thought they were going to see more passengers. Their load factor was down to 82%, down from 89% last year. Kind of a significant drop, but they're forecasting that things will swing back after the summer ends to a more normalized –

[00:21:01] JR: Not great though for a US airline to be reporting a not great summer season, because this is the season aside from the holidays at the end of the year. If you're not carrying good amount of passengers right now, you're in trouble, because your full year profit is going to be in question.

[00:21:17] IP: One of the factors accompanying that drop in demand has been weather, so storms, either causing cancellations and delays or just rerouting around them. But then also dealing with the air traffic control staffing shortages, and traffic implementations that have gone along with that. And Spirit heavily focused on Florida is certainly impacted a lot by traffic initiatives from the FAA. So, a big hit there. Then, they've got seven planes that are going to be affected by the priority gear to prevent recall. They're going to have those out from Labor Day. So, they're keeping them in service, at least through Labor Day to try and maximize their time on the wing. Then, they said they will likely be out through the rest of the year.

[00:22:08] JR: Ouch. That's a long time. It seems like Spirit also had a little chunk of its fleet out of service at any given time, for a long time. If you fly through Detroit or Fort Lauderdale, you're bound to see some very yellow engineless aircraft. Then, they've always managed to keep their fleet not impacted by this. But that's a long time for some aircraft to be out of service. But they've been dealing with this for years. So, nothing new for them.

[00:22:34] IP: And Frontier Airlines is, I said in a similar boat. Thankfully for them, they're not in the same boat, because it sounds like they're going to be spared any of the recall headaches that other A320neo new operators are experiencing. Because Frontier didn't start taking their A320neos until after the bad batch of metal had been used up. So, their aircraft are new enough. Their engines are new enough that they don't have to worry about this particular issue.

But they do have to worry about flying into congested airspace, and because they have to worry about that, and because all of the other airlines flying into New York especially have to worry about that, the FAA has extended the slot waiver – the emergency, please don't fly and make it easy for us to do our jobs, waivers through the end of October. Jason, what is going on in New York? I'm holding you personally responsible.

[00:23:34] JR: It's summer, nothing's going on here. But yes, this is not great. We thought this would be a temporary thing through the peak summer demand. But if it's extended through the end of October, this really feels like it's going to be more of a semi-permanent kind of thing until the FAA gets its staffing up in New York center a bit higher, but that could take years. Just this week, CrankyFlier, Brett Snyder, who we had on the podcast before, put together a look at the July operation for US airlines. If you are an airline that so much as touches northeast airspace, you had a bad July, specifically JetBlue is like barely an airline anymore. They're more of just a company that happens to have airplanes that can sometimes fly places, 94.36% completion factor. That's not on time. That's completion factor. So, nearly 6% of all JetBlue flights in July did not operate.

United was at 95.62 since Newark just kind of melted down anytime there was a cloud and somewhere in the Northeast, and then it jumps all the way up to Alaska at 99.65%. Quite a tame year in the Pacific Northwest, it seems. But then when you look at on time arrival, that's A, 14, arrivals within 14 minutes of scheduled time. JetBlue is down at 49.58% of flights arriving on time, and Spirit is not that much better at 61.31. Again, Alaska all the way above 80%, which is pretty remarkable.

Really not great for any of the airlines heavily focused in the northeast of which JetBlue is. Spirit has a sizable amount of operations here. But just really not looking good for us here in New York or anywhere in the northeast, with the staffing issues the FAA has had in New York. It doesn't seem to be ending anytime soon, or at least not through October 28th, at least.

[00:25:33] IP: I mean, it boggles my mind that, I mean, we're going to be starting November, with airlines having to fly their full schedule. I mean, already reduced schedule. I mean, what a mess.

[00:25:44] JR: It's not great, and we can see the material impact anytime there's any sort of not even a large weather event, and anytime there's weather at all, the airports here, especially Newark, and LaGuardia. JFK seems to be fair a bit better. But anytime that those two airports, that there's any sort of weather in the northeast, they just grind to a halt. The FAA can't manage these flights appropriately. They can't issue reroutes around storms and everything backs up, and it backs up across the entire country. Then their entire airline operations just fall over. It's going to get worse before it gets better, which is not something you want to hear as an airline passenger here in the northeast. But something's got to give and apparently that's that 10% of flights continually for the foreseeable future.

[00:26:31] IP: As we talked about a few episodes ago, this was a possibility, it has now come to pass. Western Global Airlines, the charter cargo carrier has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. They say that a combination of factors led to their filing, including the resurgence of belly cargo, and the closure of the Chinese market in late 2022 and early 2023, with a resurgence of COVID, and as well as a bunch of other things reading their bankruptcy filing protection makes them sound like they are subject to external forces only and through no fault of their own, have come to this position that they are in.

I think, looking at the airline, one would say that's a rosy vision of what happened. There's also been a lot of criticism about the airline's decisions and management that have put them in this particular position. But now that they filed for Chapter 11, it'll be interesting to see what happens. A few episodes ago, we talked about Western Global CEO, Jim Neff, who, through some financial maneuvering, put himself at the forefront of the creditors for the airline by buying a large portion of the airline's debt. So, if they went through bankruptcy, he would be at the head of the line for repayment. We'll see what happens.

[00:28:07] JR: Yes, we sure will. Wouldn't it be great to see an airline, as strange an airline as it is being Western Global. I would hate to see them cease operation, but they're not all that old airline, right? Didn't they just start up like five years ago?

[00:28:21] IP: They're a little older than that. But yes, they're not terribly old. They've had some very interesting customers and carried some very interesting cargo over their history. They continue to operate. They are continuing to operate operating their normal schedule, but they're

trying to restructure their debt, as well as, kind of unwind some of the less beneficial business interactions they have, shall we say that? We'll say that. So, we'll see how that goes as far as their bankruptcy protection goes and see what the restructuring plan is. It'll be interesting to see how long these MD-11s stick around, which is really the aviation angle that I'm concerned with here, because they're going away fast.

[00:29:04] JR: We know that they can operate for as long as they can toss money at them for. Any aircraft can last forever, as long as you keep it maintained, but they have two 777 freighters on order. Who knows if that'll ever happen. But they also have a couple of 747s, so they're not wholly reliant on that MD-11. But that, by far, is the bulk of their fleet.

[00:29:29] IP: Let's go from very old aircraft to very new aircraft, because Mongolian Airlines is getting its first 787 soon and I'm excited about this.

[00:29:40] JR: That's great. Wasn't this supposed to happen a long time ago?

[00:29:42] IP: It was. It was supposed to happen, basically at the beginning of the pandemic, and then all sorts of other things happened. You may have remembered a thing called COVID. That derailed a whole bunch of plans, but now they're back on track. They're going to be sending their 787s to Frankfurt, Seoul, Istanbul first, but the Mongolian delegation came to the US this week, and expressed their interest in flying to the US as soon as the second half of 2024 with their new 787s. And it sounds like San Francisco is going to be where that particular aircraft goes. So, if you're spotting at SFO, be on the lookout for that particular airplane late next year.

[00:30:25] JR: Well, here's an interesting fact. Of course, your planespotters.net, at least, the first aircraft that should be taken by Mongolian, you may recall from not all that long ago as being the guest of honor of Boeing at the Paris Air Show. The Riyadh Air 787.

[00:30:43] IP: Yes, it was a –

[00:30:44] JR: Once upon a time in the Mongolian livery, and then it sat around a while, then somehow became Riyadh Air aircraft at that very nice livery. But I guess that was just really a publicity stunt because that aircraft is going back to Mongolia.

[00:30:58] IP: Correct. And they're not starting operations for another two years. So, they don't really –

[00:31:03] JR: That's an expensive, temporary paint job.

[00:31:07] IP: You know what, I don't even know if it was painted, or if it was a –

[00:31:11] JR: You think it was a sticker?

[00:31:12] IP: I think it was a full wrap. I think so.

[00:31:14] JR: Really? I mean, that would make me feel a little bit better about it, I guess.

[00:31:17] IP: Or did they paint it? I don't know. I have to go back and check. Did they do a video of the Riyadh Air painting? I don't know if they did.

[00:31:23] JR: I don't know. But some aircraft wraps can be so well done that you would never even know it's not actual paint.

[00:31:30] IP: Well, the Dubai Air Show 2019, Dubai Air Show, I want to say was the – remember that purple and pink livery that they had on the 787?

[00:31:46] JR: Mm-hmm. Of course.

[00:31:46] IP: That was the world's – and I don't think we talked about this at the time. That was the world's largest aircraft wrap at the time. So, I don't know if it's just painted. They have a picture in the paint hangar.

[00:31:57] JR: I was just looking at that. I think it was paint.

[00:32:01] IP: But they don't have a video of the painting.

[00:32:03] JR: I think it was paint. I don't know if I've seen a wrap on parts like the rudder before. I'd be kind of surprised if it's a wrap. But wouldn't –

[00:32:10] IP: You can do it.

[00:32:11] JR: I guess you could do it. If you have enough time and the high-quality parts to do it, you can make it happen.

[00:32:17] IP: You can do whatever you want, Jason. I believe in you.

All right, we've been kicking this one around outside of the show and I still don't understand it. So, Jason, give me your best shot. Explain what is going on with Air Japan. What is it and why is it not what I thought it was?

[00:32:35] JR: That's unexplainable. Let's just move on. So, ANA, based in Japan has, I guess you can't call it a subcarrier, but it is, I guess, a sub carrier of its own brand called Air Japan, which to the end user, to the passenger didn't actually exist. It was just ANA, flights ANA branded aircraft, ANA branded service. You would never know you were on an Air Japan aircraft. It's kind of like a regional airline here in the US where you're boarding a SkyWest aircraft or whatever, or an Endeavor Aircraft actually operating for Delta. And unless you really know what to look for, you'd never know it wasn't actually Delta Aircraft. It's kind of the same here for Air Japan, historically operated 76s, and later on 787s for near in international, so not long haul international, but also not domestic.

But now ANA wants to compete with JAL's low cost, long haul Zipair operation, and it's tapped Air Japan to do that. So, it's going to be a little confusing. Now, there's actually a brand called Air Japan, which you'll have to know about and overtly go book yourself. I don't know if ANA is selling it. So, you can book an air Japan flight but only if it's the actual Air Japan branded flights and you'll be able to start doing that as of February 9th of next year on the Narita to Bangkok line. So, that's exciting.

[00:34:04] IP: But isn't Zipair long, long haul, low cost?

[00:34:06] JR: It is long, long haul, low cost, but I guess you got to start somewhere, right?

[00:34:10] IP: I mean, yes, okay. That's fair. But I guess I'm surprised because it's not like they're a new airline. It's not like they don't know what they're doing.

[00:34:17] JR: In the case of Zipair that was a new sub brand of JAL that did not exist prior. In this case, ANA has just tapped its own sub brand Air Japan to operate now under its own name, Air Japan and depending apparently on the destination. The callsign of the airline is either Air Japan or not. It's very confusing, but it looks interesting. It's 78-8s which is interesting because I'm pretty sure the rest of the Air Japan fleet is dash nines. So, this will be unique, but it looks like a very acceptable product for low cost, long haul. If you've ever flown Scoot. You will certainly recognize the theme here, but it's all economy. There's no premium or even extra legroom economy, really. This is just straight up from first row to the last row of the aircraft economy. Whereas Zipair operating for JAL actually does have a pretty nice but bare bones business class, but you will not be finding that on Air Japan unless you're on an Air Japan flight operating as ANA. Got it?

[00:35:19] IP: Crystal clear. Clear as mud. Okay, we're at the end of the show and we saved the best for last. This was last week at this point. There were some images circulating on the social media showing the box of a new Lego set.

[00:35:40] JR: Oh, this definitely piquing your interest.

[00:35:43] IP: I thought to myself, "Hmm, that looks like the Concorde." My friends, it was. Lego confirmed this week that a Concorde Lego set is coming. Rumors say, and they haven't confirmed this part. Rumors say that it will be out in September and the price point is about \$200. I hope both of those things are true, because I am in a very much shut up and take my money mode. I really want this. It looks cool. I want it now. If I can't have it now, I want it in a month.

[00:36:17] JR: All right. Well, that's good news. I mean, Lego Concorde are cool. But Brooklyn's getting a real Concorde, at least for a little bit.

[00:36:22] IP: Well, look at you.

[00:36:24] JR: Yes. It turns out the Intrepid Museum on the west side of Manhattan here wants to rehab or do something with its Concorde, which you can't do on site. So, it is barging it over here to Brooklyn, the Navy Yard for, I think the rest of the year at least or the summer for some maintenance work. So, I'm going to ride a city bike on down to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and go see a real Concorde. And maybe on the way back, I'll pick up a Lego Concorde to commemorate.

[00:36:50] IP: You should get a landscape painting. Go build the Lego Concorde while looking at the real one on –

[00:36:56] JR: Yes, the security will kick me out real quick if I do that.

[00:36:59] IP: I'm sure it would be just fine. All right, Episode 228 of AVTalk. Just a reminder that this is a fresh episode, but next week's will not be. I'm on vacation. Jason's doing something, I don't know. But he'll figure it out.

[00:37:16] JR: I don't know how to record the podcast without you. So, there won't be a podcast.

[00:37:20] IP: We'll have something out, kind of looking back at some of the things that we've done so far this year and looking forward to some of the things that we want to do through the rest of the year, and into next year. So, stay tuned for that next week. But until then, I am Ian Petchenik here, as always, with –

[00:37:37] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]