

EPISODE 246

[EPISODE]

[0:00:07] IP: Hello, and welcome to episode 246 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, once again, as always with –

[0:00:18] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Apologies for my extended leave of absence. I guess, that was the better part of three episodes, two of which were vacation. As much as I love talking to you for my daily, or my weekly therapy session, Ian, I needed a little break.

[0:00:37] IP: You need to take care of yourself.

[0:00:39] JR: I need to take care of myself. Then I immediately went into the post-travel sickness stage, where talking just wasn't happening. I'm still not completely over it, but I'm going to power through it, because if I miss three podcasts in a row, I'm pretty sure you just replace me with Ned, or probably, Jeremy.

[0:00:57] IP: No, no, no. You, sir, are irreplaceable.

[0:01:01] JR: Oh, thank you.

[0:01:01] IP: But we would hold tryouts for sure.

[0:01:03] JR: Oh, okay. Yeah. Open casting talk.

[0:01:06] IP: Open casting. Well, I'm glad to – as someone who's been following your recovery, I'm glad to hear your voice.

[0:01:16] JR: Thank you.

[0:01:17] IP: You're sounding much better than you were even just a few days ago.

[0:01:20] JR: Let's see where I am 40 minutes from now.

[0:01:22] IP: Yeah. We'll see how things go. You can just click the mic, or tap the mic. Tap twice to agree. Tap once to disagree. It'll all work out. Jason's back this week. I'm back in the US. I was in Stockholm all last week for our company gathering.

[0:01:43] JR: Missed that. Did you save me any herring? Anything at all?

[0:01:48] IP: I brought you 20 pounds of herring, and it's in the mail. I'm so sorry to whatever letter carrier has to deliver that. We made it back. Yeah, no, it was a good trip. I'm sad that Jason couldn't be there, but it was a good week. For those that were hopeful to hear the conversation with our co-founders, that's been put off for a little bit, because we tried to do a recording and the room where it just – there's bad audio that's passable. Then there's just – you just listen to it and you're like, “No, that's –”

[0:02:25] JR: You were in the economy conference room, weren't you?

[0:02:29] IP: No, no. We were just in a conference – it was like a conference setup thing that we were in and it just didn't work out. It sounded like we were all standing at one end of the tunnel and then someone had put a microphone that they used to record one of the first phonographs at the other end of a tunnel. For whatever reason, it didn't quite work out. I'm going to try and turn that conversation into a transcript and a blog post, and hopefully, we can have Mika and Olav on the podcast at some point in the future. I'm sorry to our listeners who are looking forward to that, but we'll have something.

Yeah, so a good bit of seeing everybody, seeing that the company is still growing, especially on the people who make FlightRadar24 even better side of things. That's fun and got to take a look at a few things that are coming up in the new year. One of the first releases after the new year is going to be really very pleasing to a lot of longtime FlightRadar24 users, especially, and update that many users have been asking for for a very long time, one that I'm certainly looking forward to and I'm looking forward to saying more about that in the next couple of weeks. For now, Jason, I ask you this, well, you're in Dulles right now. After your return trip, are you done for the year? Are you done flying?

[0:03:54] JR: I am done for the year. After tomorrow, my most loved, beloved, actually hated, revered flight, I guess, from Dulles to LaGuardia tomorrow, which who knows how long that might take. But hey, they just posted the Z5 gate. If you ever fly out of Dulles, you know how coveted Z5 is. After that, unless there is any unexpected pop-ups, I am done for 2023. I've had enough. Someone else can take a few flights in my place.

[0:04:25] IP: Someone else can be Jason Rabinowitz on the ticket for a couple of weeks.

[0:04:29] JR: It was a good year. This thing I have on my phone tells me I flew 65,920 miles this year. I guess, we'll round that up to 66,000 next year. That'll be 34 flights; eight of them long-haul. I spent six days and let's say, 15 hours in the air this year. Not too bad.

[0:04:49] IP: Not too bad. Yeah, I had a slower year this year than I did last year for a variety of reasons, mostly because I was moving house the entire back half of the year. I think during that period would have – There comes a point when you want to live to travel another day. I think that's what happened this year. I was down from last year, only 13 flights this year. Only, let's see, 25,000 miles, I think.

[0:05:20] JR: You'll catch up.

[0:05:21] IP: Let me double check. Yeah, 25,000 and change. But 55 hours and 54 minutes in the air. Some really good travel this year. Some really good travel. I was leaving Copenhagen and the customs officer was looking at my passport to stamp the exit visa. She goes, "You come here a lot." It wasn't a question. Because she was like, "You come here a lot." I was like, "Yeah, it's true."

[0:05:46] JR: The biggest takeaway for me this year is my most flown aircraft somehow and still tomorrow, until tomorrow, 24 hours from now is the 777-300ER. I'm very happy with that.

[0:05:57] IP: Wow.

[0:05:58] JR: I have spent 42 hours on board that particular aircraft traveling 21,776 miles. That's a good year when the 777-300ER is your most flown aircraft.

[0:06:10] IP: Yeah, for sure.

[0:06:11] JR: I'll take that.

[0:06:12] IP: My biggest av geek accomplishment this year was ticking off all of the 777s for the year. I've got the Dash 8, Dash 9, and Dash 10 now in my cards. It was the 787s and, of course, the venerable, and I nudge, nudge wink, wink, venerable A330-300. There you go. A good travel year, especially looking back on the trips that beyond work, I think Dorkfest was the best one and a very good Dorkfest this year. Looking forward to more flying in –

[0:06:46] JR: Yeah, it was a good year. Tell us about a couple hundred passengers who ended the year on a really low note.

[0:06:53] IP: Ooh. Ooh. Yeah. I mean, as someone who flies over Goose Bay on a regular basis, I always think about that, when considering where we might end up if there's a diversion. 270 passengers from a Delta flight from Amsterdam to Detroit actually ended up there. Because of the weather, after they landed in Goose Bay, because Delta sent a rescue flight almost immediately, and they were ready to go. They were like, "All right, let's go. Everybody on the plane. We're headed out."

Then the weather deteriorated at Goose Bay, so they got stuck there. The pilots from the rescue flight timed out. Then, they had to spend the night. Then in the morning, everything was better. The third A330 from Delta actually got them to where they needed to go.

[0:07:53] JR: There were more Delta A330s in Goose Bay than some airlines have aircraft in their entire fleet.

[0:08:02] IP: That is both true and a weird – I think sometimes, we get into baseball statistics, or an international frame of reference, maybe cricket statistics. I'm not sure, where it's like, the

aircraft that departed on Tuesday can only fly left circles three times. It's very, very interesting statistics here. But yes, that's technically correct. That's correct.

[0:08:25] JR: That's correct. That's right. Yeah, really unfortunate situation. It turns out, one of the engines on the A330 had an anti-ice issue, which is a particular thing you need when flying in that part of the world. When they got there, they said, the rescue aircraft, because this is Delta we're talking about, was immediately dispatched, but then the crew timed out. That is just the icing on the cake of your day, where you think you're getting out of there, and then you're not. Then you're stuck in army barracks overnight.

Every account, every article we've read about is that our neighbors to the north here in the US were extremely hospitable and caring. Everyone said, "Oh, yeah. It was actually not so bad. There are worse places."

[0:09:04] IP: It was a fine – I think the thing that most people don't understand, or think about is that when we say army barracks, what we're talking about is basically, a no frills hotel, or a college dorm. It's not a big room with bunk beds.

[0:09:21] JR: Right. Maybe –

[0:09:22] IP: Or, there might be bunk beds. I don't know. But everybody gets to a room, kind of thing. Yeah, everybody made it home safely. The next day, all the aircraft are back in service. The aircraft that had the anti-ice issue was back in service the next day, and is currently, let's see, in Seattle waiting to head to Atlanta.

[0:09:43] JR: I wonder how many A330s Delta has to spare in Detroit? If the third one broke, would they just send a fourth one, if it mistakes? How many –

[0:09:50] IP: Just keep sending. At that point, you just keep sending them.

[0:09:52] JR: How do they have so many to spare.

[0:09:54] IP: You just keep sending them. I don't know.

[0:09:57] **JR:** All right. You lost another 330?

[0:10:02] **IP:** How many movie references can we sneak in this podcast? I don't know.

[0:10:05] **JR:** That's a great one.

[0:10:07] **IP:** That's a great one. Let's see. They've got 31 A330-300s in the fleet, plus another 11 200s. They have 26 A330neos already?

[0:10:21] **JR:** Yeah. They're –

[0:10:22] **IP:** Wow.

[0:10:23] **JR:** They got a lot.

[0:10:25] **IP:** That's a lot of planes.

[0:10:28] **JR:** Pretty much for every 767-300 in the fleet, they need an A330 replacement. They've got a lot of 767s to replace.

[0:10:36] **IP:** They sure do. Yeah, 45 of them still in the fleet. Then the 764 is a 21. How about that? You don't realize how big the big US airline fleets are, until you forget that they're that big and then go look at the fleet list and go, "Wow, there's that many planes."

[0:10:54] **JR:** With hundreds more on order somehow.

[0:10:57] **IP:** Yeah. Yes. Somehow, there's room for more. Maybe they'll just all be parked at Goose Bay.

[0:11:02] **JR:** That would be unfortunate. Let's hope not.

[0:11:04] IP: Let's hope not. All right, moving on, Boeing has a presumptive new CEO, eventually. Stephanie Pope has been chosen for the Chief Operating Officer role, which is a brand-new job at Boeing. Her promotion, along with the fact that this position was created specifically for her, has led to wide-ranging speculation that Pope will become the CEO when current CEO David Calhoun retires. Pope is currently the head of Boeing Global Services. She's been with the company for nearly 30 years. It'd be poetic to see the 30th year next year have her become CEO. She's been the Chief Financial Officer of both Boeing Global Services and Boeing's commercial airplanes unit. She knows numbers.

I mean, I think from Boeing's perspective, she's widely respected throughout the company and has the trust of investors. I think that's a super important thing for the CEO of Boeing to have, trust.

[0:12:11] JR: Yeah. What I think is important here is that the current CEO, David Calhoun, he was not by any means an outsider to Boeing. He was on the board of directors before he was CEO of Boeing. He definitely had his hand in a lot of the doings, a lot of the big decisions that got Boeing into the situation. It currently finds itself in which we won't really get into, but it's not a particularly great situation. Stephanie Pope, as far as I can tell, has never been on the board of directors. She has extensive history at Boeing, Boeing commercial airplanes, Boeing commercial services, but she was never, as far as I can tell, at the level of being on the board at Boeing. You can't really attribute any of the systemic culture, or engineering decisions back to her, probably at least at that higher level. It does seem at first blush, like a legitimately good choice. I hope we do see her as CEO. That would be a breath of fresh air, I think.

[0:13:12] IP: Yeah. I think, so far, so good. It'll be interesting to see how she progresses into the COO role that's new. I'm keen to see how quickly she becomes the face of the company, versus Calhoun as a CEO, who is from what I can tell, been between mildly uncomfortable and actively running away from speaking to people outside the company. It'll be interesting to see how she fills that role as well.

Boeing for its part had a fairly good November. 45 MAX aircraft went out the door in November. That's up from just 18 in October and 15 the month before that. Deliveries accelerating, Boeing said, "Hey, we're going to increase production as well," when they were talking about how many

deliveries they made. Moving in the right direction. It seems that all things, especially coming on the heels of the fairly substantial order book increase coming out of the Dubai Air Show this year. Boeing, looking good.

[0:14:22] JR: Now, they just need to keep it looking good. Boeing has this cyclical recent history where things look good, then things look really bad. Things look good, then things look really bad. Let's see if they can keep it good for more than a couple weeks. That would be a nice change.

[0:14:36] IP: That would be a nice change. This isn't rough transition to say that we need to keep things looking good, but this is something that's been in the works for a while, and it's airworthiness directives are just –

[0:14:48] JR: Technically, not a Boeing thing.

[0:14:52] IP: Well, yeah. True. We're talking about the 737NG, specifically the CFM 56-7B model of the engines that power the 737NG. FAA is adopting airworthiness directives that will require airlines to adopt Boeing's design changes to the cowls on those engines as a result of two fan blade out events that occurred on Southwest aircraft. One of those being the fan blade out event that led to shrapnel puncturing the fuselage, that led to the death of a passenger on the flight on the Southwest 737 flight a few years ago.

The redesign of the cowl is an attempt to contain the shrapnel, because the blade itself was actually contained. NTSB has said, it's not technically an uncontained engine failure, because the engine was contained. The cowl became the shrapnel itself. This redesign will hopefully, prevent any shrapnel from impacting the fuselage in the future, if a fan blade out event were to occur again. Sure, it's possible as that would happen, so you want to obviously design for safety.

[0:16:10] JR: That is a lot of engines. They're going to have to go back and retrofit with this design change. How many CFM 56s are probably on the wings of 737NGs? I can't even imagine how many.

[0:16:23] IP: Thousands.

[0:16:23] JR: I guess, it's however many NGs are in service, times two, plus however many spares are out there. It's a huge number.

[0:16:31] IP: Yeah. It affects 2,000 aircraft. 4,000 engines, plus spares. That's just the US. Yeah, that's a lot of engines. This is not a surprise. Boeing's been working on this for a while. They've already said, "Here's the fix. This is what we're doing." The FAA is saying, "Okay, this is a good idea. This is something that we should do. Airline should adopt these changes that Boeing has put into place."

Jason, you've been gone for a couple weeks and we didn't have a terribly long conversation a few weeks ago when you were here. We've been neglectful of the Pratt & Whitney 1100G engine.

[0:17:15] JR: What now? What happened?

[0:17:16] IP: I'm here to change that. The FAA is now expected to issue airworthiness directives, multiple airworthiness directives that expand the scope of the inspections and replacements for the contaminated parts on the Pratt & Whitney 1100Gs. They're not saying there are more. The FAA is just saying, "We've been through all the paperwork and here are the airworthiness directives." Those are expected to come out before the end of the year that will mandate the changes and lay out how things are supposed to go.

The issue hasn't gotten worse necessarily, but the FAA is saying, "We are now catching up, so to speak, to the Pratt & Whitney issuance of guidance and mandating these things." Not a bad thing, but just reiterating what we already know.

[0:18:07] JR: All right. Well, we haven't seen any supremely negative news come out of this recently. This is just more of the same.

[0:18:16] IP: It's been a few quiet weeks, I guess. Yeah.

[0:18:18] JR: That's good. This is what happens when I take off, or I can't join the podcast. Pratt & Whitney has a good month.

[0:18:23] IP: There you go. Let's see. Should we do some orders now? I think we should.

[0:18:27] JR: We love orders. Orders are great to keep the industry going.

[0:18:32] IP: We've got Avalon, the Irish-based lessor taking a 140 more, or ordering 140 more aircraft. That's in addition to the 200 that the lessor has already ordered this year. We've got, let's see, a 100 more A321neos and 40 more Boeing 737-8 MAX aircraft. That's a lot of planes.

[0:19:00] JR: It's interesting that they'd come back this late in the year after already ordering so many aircrafts and saying, "You know what? No, we want a 100 more 321neos." I can't even imagine the negotiation and the tactics that go on to not just ordering them all at once, but ordering several times throughout the year. Not just a couple, but literally, a 100 aircraft in one shot. You'd have to be a fly on the wall for that.

[0:19:25] IP: You want to shop the Christmas sales.

[0:19:26] JR: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Okay. This is a black Friday, probably.

[0:19:30] IP: Exactly. This takes their delivery of aircraft, their delivery schedule out to 2032. They have nine years of aircraft all ready to go.

[0:19:42] JR: It's a lot of aircraft. A lot of aircraft replaced. A lot to build and more importantly, for Avalon, a lot of aircraft to place with airlines.

[0:19:49] IP: Yup. No specific placement noted in the order. These are just ordering them to have them ready to go. Cathay Pacific, currently, and all, or Cathay Pacific Cargo, currently an all Boeing 747 freighter fleet has ordered six Airbus A350 freighters with the option for 20 more. How about that?

[0:20:16] JR: That's a big defection.

[0:20:17] IP: I mean, in so much as, yeah. I mean, to be fair, they do have 777Fs on order. This will be, let's see, the first aircraft is going to go over to Cathay cargo in 2027, and they'll take the delivery of the first six all through 2029.

[0:20:40] JR: You would've thought Cathay would have been a shoe in for the 777X freighter, but I guess, not. I guess, they saw something they liked in the A350 a bit more.

[0:20:49] IP: I mean, they have the order for it. I assume that the fleet will eventually be split as the 747 freighters leave the fleet. But they have the dash 8s. I mean, those aren't going anywhere for a while. The 400s, I think, are going to see replacement with the A350 first.

[0:21:06] JR: I think it's long retired now, but the silver bullet there. 747-400, that was just all silver, shiny little – I miss that plane.

[0:21:17] IP: I mean, we could bring it back if you wanted to start an airline.

[0:21:21] JR: Can you tweet it out on jet photos tomorrow for me?

[0:21:23] IP: Yeah. I can do that.

[0:21:24] JR: Thank you.

[0:21:25] IP: You got it. Let's see. Staying in the region, Japan Airlines is sending its first A350-1000 to JFK in New York. We have a date now, January 24th.

[0:21:39] JR: All right.

[0:21:39] IP: They will get, yeah.

[0:21:40] JR: That's exciting.

[0:21:41] IP: They'll get their second A350-1000 sometime in the beginning of the year, probably March or April, and that will allow them to go daily on the Tokyo-JFK route with the A350-1000. Then Jason, if you were going to have a second destination where you sent your premier flagship A350-1000 from Tokyo, where would you send it next after that?

[0:22:06] JR: Man, think of the world-class cities, like London, or Paris, or LA, or even Chicago, maybe. Though we don't really give Chicago first dibs on nice things. I'd go with, let's call it London. That's a long flight.

[0:22:21] IP: It is a long flight. But you know where they're actually going to send it?

[0:22:24] JR: Where?

[0:22:26] IP: Dulles.

[0:22:27] JR: Why?

[0:22:29] IP: I don't know. But that's where –

[0:22:30] JR: Why? I mean, it's a one world hub, but not –

[0:22:35] IP: That's right. You just answered your question.

[0:22:37] JR: It's not where I'd send my premier highly touted, technologically sophisticated first-class equipped with seat-mounted headphone things. I wouldn't sit in a DFW. But if you are a DFW-bound passenger and you want to fly JAL, you just got one heck of a gift.

[0:22:58] IP: Yup. By the time the middle of the year rolls around next year, JAL will have three A350-1000s, and that will allow them to begin service to DFW. How about that?

[0:23:12] JR: Lucky, lucky Dulles. I mean, after JFK first, of course.

[0:23:17] IP: Yeah, of course, of course. This week, the Comac C919 and, importantly, the ARJ21 are in Hong Kong on a display. This marks –

[0:23:30] JR: Yeah. That is exciting.

[0:23:33] IP: Part of it. Part of that is exciting. Part of it's baffling. The visit by the C919 to Hong Kong marks the first time that that aircraft has left mainland China. It also marks the first time that the ARJ21 has done – it doesn't matter. Nobody cares about that.

[0:23:49] JR: The first time the ARJ21 has been relevant in a while, let's just say.

[0:23:53] IP: Sure. Yeah, interesting to see that it's on display. They might do some flying displays over the harbor in Hong Kong. That should be interesting to see if it happens. Keep an eye out for that.

[0:24:05] JR: It's one baby step towards the 919 becoming a true third competitor in the narrow-body world. I'm excited for that. I mean, going to Hong Kong outside of mainland China is the greatest leap of any sort. It's a baby step. I'm excited for that. The ARJ21 couldn't care less in the slightest. The C919, it's have an interesting story. This is the first step towards, I think, legitimizing outside of China. It's going to be an uphill battle. I guess, starting in Hong Kong makes sense.

[0:24:39] IP: You got to start somewhere. Let's go to Russia, in the sense that we're going to talk about Russia. We are not actually going to Russia. I feel like I need to clarify it and quickly. Surprise. The Euro A320 that made an emergency landing in a field, because the pilots forgot that aircraft need fuel to fly has been buttoned up for the winter. We got all excited.

[0:25:03] JR: They should have watched CNN talking about MH, a Malaysian plane way back when they told us without fuel –

[0:25:09] IP: Yes, that's true.

[0:25:10] JR: - the airplane will struggle to That's true. That's true. That was the 777.

[0:25:16] JR: Oh, yeah. The 320, it's an Airbus.

[0:25:19] IP: Who knows? It might be different.

[0:25:23] JR: This is planning. This disappointing news, it's mothball. I was really hoping to get some really crappy video out of Russia of this thing taking off from an icy runway.

[0:25:33] IP: Oh, absolutely.

[0:25:35] JR: Seems less and less likely that's going to happen. Then there's going to mothball it and part it out in place and throw some parts in the back of a flatbed and bring it to an airport where that parts are badly needed. It got us a little excited for a little while, that maybe, just maybe this was going to happen seemingly.

[0:25:53] IP: I thought we were going to have a chance.

[0:25:56] JR: Too bad. But, oh, well.

[0:26:00] IP: Last but not least, I can't believe it actually happened. A year ago now, we were talking about the Ilyushin 96 freighter that Russia was pulling out of storage, that had been stored since 2004, 2005. We didn't know where it was going to go. Then it was going to go to Airbridge Cargo, which before the invasion of Ukraine, had operated a global fleet of 747 aircraft. Then that wasn't going to happen anymore. Now they painted it into Skygate's airlines livery and it's flying. It's actually flying. It's running cargo. I can't believe it actually happened.

[0:26:52] JR: That is outrageous. How long was this aircraft grounded for?

[0:26:57] IP: I mean years. Years and years and years.

[0:27:00] JR: If this is right on point spotters.net, it was grounded for over a decade. It was withdrawn from you February 28th, 2012. Reentered service December 9th, 2023. Over a decade mothballed. The funny thing is it's not even that old an aircraft, but it's only a 14-year-old aircraft.

It spent almost its entire life grounded, not even operating. If you've got to pick a mothballed aircraft, this one makes sense.

[0:27:30] IP: It was available.

[0:27:33] JR: It only ran for three years. It's a baby.

[0:27:36] IP: It's a baby. Yeah, it originally flew with Pullet and then was mothballed and now is back with Skygates. You can track the flights now, because they apparently installed ADSB. That's helpful. Flying on Moscow, UAE routes. It's been to Dubai. It's been to Sharjah. It is currently in, which one is it in now? It's currently in Sharjah. There you go. How about that?

[0:28:06] JR: That's, I guess, not super unexpected, but really, a desperate move. Hey, you got to do what you got to do.

[0:28:14] IP: I guess so. Jason, you made it through the episode. I'm proud of you.

[0:28:18] JR: In under 40 minutes.

[0:28:20] IP: Thank you for your – you gave me a 40-minute timeline.

[0:28:23] JR: Yeah.

[0:28:24] IP: Yeah. You gave me a 40-minute timeline and we got it done. Over the next couple of weeks, let's see, looking into my crystal ball, also known as IKAL, we've got next week is a regular episode, I hope, barring anything else. Then we'll go into some more retrospective material, shall we say, for that coming up. That's where I ask for your help, dear listeners. Let us know if you've been listening to the podcast for the year. Thank you so much, first of all. Second of all, let us know which episode you liked the best. Let us know which topic of discussion, which interview you enjoyed the best. Anything that you thought was very, very good, let us know. Also, let us know what you didn't like and we'll get rid of whatever that is and do more of whatever you liked in the coming year. You can email us at podcast@fr24.com. We'll have a look at that and incorporate that into the next few episodes.

This has been AvTalk episode 246. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[0:29:34] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]