

EPISODE 270

[EPISODE]

[0:00:07] IP: Hello and welcome to episode 270 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik in Stockholm, here, as always with –

[0:00:16] JR: Jason Rabinowitz in Hamburg, dealing with Germany's legendarily bad Wi-Fi. But I have a guest with me. Who are you? What's your name?

[0:00:25] SM: Do I have to answer that?

[0:00:27] JR: You do.

[0:00:27] SM: This is Seth Miller.

[0:00:29] IP: Hey, Seth. Welcome back to the show.

[0:00:31] SM: Also, in Germany. Thank you, thank you. I have to say, we're recording this in Jason's room. I am admiring the plethora of stripy things he has managed to collect on the way to Germany.

[0:00:41] JR: Yes, stripy things going to say, hi.

[0:00:41] IP: Sounds like someone flew Condor.

[0:00:43] JR: I did. I flew Condor for the first time from JFK, a very early departure, like 4.30 p.m. I was lucky enough to fly their business class and I collected all of the stripy things from the amenity kit, to the tin that you put the amenities in. I have some other stripy things. It was actually a really, really good experience. I really enjoyed it. Frankfurt, the connection, sucked as always, but that's no surprise. It's going to suck every time. My connection to Lufthansa was fine. But Seth, you had a different experience.

[0:01:15] SM: Yeah. I am also quite jealous, because Jason has amenity kits that look nice, and the amenity kit that I collected despite flying an economy came, because my checked bag did not make it all the way to me.

[0:01:26] JR: Nor has it made it to you five days later.

[0:01:29] SM: I think we're on day six now. But yeah, we believe it's been located. It has been forwarded. It actually started moving, but it's made it to Hamburg, but still not yet to the hotel.

[0:01:37] JR: All he had to do was call in a favor for a C-suite employee of the bag handling company on another continent to get that bag moving.

[0:01:45] SM: Piece of cake, right?

[0:01:46] JR: Yeah. No big deal. It's like, the industry just works. It's magic.

[0:01:50] IP: Yeah. Oh, yeah. You don't even have to lift a finger most of the time.

[0:01:53] JR: Nope. Nope, nope.

[0:01:55] SM: But yeah, we're having a great time.

[0:01:57] IP: Yeah. You're in Hamburg.

[0:01:57] JR: We're here. Our annual journey to the aircraft interior expo here in Hamburg. We've seen some things. We've laughed at some things. We've cried at other things. We'll summarize it in a little bit, but Ian, what order do we want to go in?

[0:02:10] IP: Well, the first thing I have on my list is MAYA. Tell me who, or what is MAYA.

[0:02:16] SM: Ah. MAYA. Yes. Panasonic Avionics, maker of entertainment and connectivity solutions for airplanes and Collins Aerospace maker of many, many other different things that go

inside airplanes, but especially seats have teamed up to introduce what they're calling a concept seat. The MAYA concept seat is, we'll say, a super-premium business class.

[0:02:40] JR: Emerging on first class, like old school first class, yeah.

[0:02:43] SM: Right. It's not the fully enclosed walls, or anything like that. It is a relatively large, live flat bed, but the specific thing about it that is special from the Panasonic side is a 45-inch curved OLED screen. Did I get that right?

[0:03:02] JR: Yup. Yup. It takes up your entire field of view in that seat, which I think is novel, but also, a little concerning of just everything you see in front of you is screen. There's a lot of applications for that. You can be watching your cinemascope aspect ratio content, if available, but also, you can have widgets on the side of the screen that tell you where you are and how much time is left in the flight, or before the meal and you can have other stuff, and this and that. It was just, it's a lot. But it's a concept. It's not a real thing right now.

[0:03:35] IP: They should put a flight sim in.

[0:03:37] JR: Oh, actually, that –

[0:03:38] SM: Someone actually joked, we were there talking about, does it take up so much space that you'd have to reduce the number of seats, or raise prices, or things like that? Someone joked, "Well, the view is good enough, we could just take out the flight deck and put an extra couple seats in up there and maybe some other people from time to time."

[0:03:52] JR: Yeah.

[0:03:53] SM: Obviously, not going to happen.

[0:03:54] JR: It's a concept. They're shopping in around seeing, is this something airlines are interested in? Would passengers want this? Maybe aspects of it will make it into a real world. Or a smaller version, because a 43-inch screen, it's, in my opinion, was too much, but maybe they could do 35 inches, a little smaller.

[0:04:12] SM: It was one of those sort of things like, because you're so close to it, it was a little bit, you can't see the whole screen left to right in a single from – with your head forward. I will say, there were a few other things from the seat side of it. There were also interesting. It had an integrated heating cooling system through the mesh fabric of the seat. It had a headphoneless audio system, which there's a couple different versions of this out now. One is flying actually on JAL in first class.

[0:04:40] JR: And business.

[0:04:42] SM: And business on their new A350s. This is a slightly different implementation of that, but it's, you're sitting in the seat, it sounds like you are in a movie theater full on everything. I was sitting in the seat listening and could barely hear the guy doing the demo, while everybody around me could not hear the movie at all.

[0:04:58] JR: Well, it also had haptic feedback, so you're watching a movie and it's poking you and vibrating the seat around the audio in the movie, which is cool.

[0:05:07] SM: Yeah. The other thing it does is they cut – it's an ergonomic adjustment, or whatnot. It's a newer version of the old Thompson Vantage inflatable cushion thing.

[0:05:19] IP: Oh, okay.

[0:05:20] JR: Right. Ala JetBlue mint. OG mint.

[0:05:23] SM: Yeah. The old JetBlue mind had this. They actually, I think, finally turned it off at one point, because it was not great. But this version of it, as you shift and adjust, it too shifts and adjusts to keep you properly supported. There's a lot of pieces of this that are very interesting, a lot of things that are very new and new always means different, which means weird, which means maybe it's right, maybe it's wrong and we'll have to figure it out. Right. We fear change. But it would be up for the three minutes, five minutes I sat in it, some very cool bits about it, some stuff I'm not entirely sold on. But give me 12, 14 hours –

[0:05:57] JR: That CI [inaudible 0:05:57]? You have a concept.

[0:05:59] SM: Give me 12 or 14 hours and a glass of champagne, I might think differently.

[0:06:04] IP: Fair enough. Let's walk back closer to the present and talk about some advancements in accessibility onboard the aircraft. This has been a theme over the past couple years of AIX, right?

[0:06:15] JR: Yeah. There's been an increasingly very welcomed long overdue focus on accessibility. The big headlining item last year of the show was the Delta flight product's first domestic first-class style wheelchair seat. Do they have an official name for this thing?

[0:06:30] SM: Air4All.

[0:06:31] JR: Air4All. It's a domestic first-class recliner style seat that basically folds up and away. A wheelchair user of an actual wheelchair, not like an aisle chair or some travel specific chair can move their chair into position where the seat traditionally is and it could be strapped down using, basically, hooks on seat belts that are integrated into the floor. This year, the update to that is it looks like an actual seat now. Looks like a new Delta first-class seat. But also, they've introduced a version of it for economy, seeing as that most passengers don't fly in premium cabins, they fly in economy. It's very much the same concept, two out of 30 seats on an aircraft in a row fold away, the wheelchair is strapped down into that position and then it's just folded back and looks like a normal ordinary seat again.

[0:07:21] SM: It's important to note that the design here is it always has to be the first row, because there's generally clearance from the door around that monument when you get onboard that there's space for the larger wheelchairs, the larger width wheelchair that a passenger would come on in in their own. As you go down the aisle, it is not wide enough. One of the reasons they talked about doing this with the economy seats is low-cost carriers, or EuroBiz style airlines that don't have a proper first-class cabin, they still needed a way to do this. That is part of it. They also had an accessible lavatory, which was very interesting. I should say, before we maybe forget the lab, Collins Aerospace also had a wheelchair mount version.

[0:08:00] JR: Two very different approaches to the same topic.

[0:08:03] SM: The Collins one doesn't involve flipping the seat out of the way, or anything like that. Certification is very different. We should say, you don't have to recertify it. Instead, they take away the monument up at the front. When you normally walk on at their plane, if you would typically see a storage closet, or the IFE control screen, or something like that to your right as you walk on, that goes away and becomes a much narrower, tiny closet that has a tray table and some other controls that flip out of it. The Collins version, you don't lose a seat, but the wheelchair passenger isn't in the normal row, they're in front of it. Win some, lose some. It's maybe a little easier to certify, but you lose some storage, instead of losing a seat, or having to trade a seat and certification stuff.

[0:08:48] JR: At the same time, Collins and Delta flight products both have accessible labs and they are also both taking very different approaches to solving that problem. Where Collins, basically, if you are familiar with the Airbus cabin flex where you have two lavs in the back of the plane, where a false wall falls away and gives you a wider space, that's what Collins is doing here, but the wall shifts out of the way and you –

[0:09:12] SM: Instead of pivoting out of the way, the wall slides laterally. It's also, the Collins one is in front of the rear door lavatory, so it's not in – Jason's talking about the space flex, or space SE2, which is where it's in the rear galley behind the doors at the back.

[0:09:29] JR: The really terrible one where you could barely even recognize that it is a lavatory and not just a flight attendant jump seat.

[0:09:34] SM: I'm not sure that's specific, or unique enough, unfortunately.

[0:09:37] JR: So true.

[0:09:39] SM: But the typical sort of, and the lav is just in front of the door at the behind the last row seats thing. The idea is instead of having one on the left and one on the right, you put two on the left or right directly adjacent to each other and you put seats where the other one was. Again, you don't lose seats. Basically, the doors are French door style, where they fold in

together to the middle and then they fold out. You can slide the center partition out of the way and then the passenger and their assistant on wall in a aisle chair can both fit in to assist with transferring to the toilet doing the business and whatnot.

It's spec'd per the new DOT rules to be two 95th percentile males, which is two very large people. I am 5'11 to 10 these days, so I'm not small. The guy who got in there with me when we closed the doors was 6'7", probably, I don't want to guess how heavy he is, but heavier than me, and we fit.

[0:10:36] JR: Tell us about the Delta version, which is a very different approach.

[0:10:39] SM: The Delta version, they put it at the front of the plane, not the back.

[0:10:43] JR: Also, a concept.

[0:10:44] SM: Also, a concept. Yeah.

[0:10:44] JR: No product.

[0:10:46] SM: These are all concepts, some more developed than others. But the Delta concept for their accessibility lav is the lav at the front of the plane, as you know, is typically on a single aisle is to the left of the door when you walk in, so between the door and the cockpit. This would be behind the door, or aft of the door, so you'd end up where the current lav is would become the storage that gets displaced, and then become part of the galley. Then this lavatory is a pretty big box, and it's, I would say, almost the size – I mean, probably is the size of the accessible lavs on a wide body. I don't know if you guys remember the old Continental 762 party lav in the middle of the cabin. It fell that big in size. Probably not quite that big, but –

[0:11:24] JR: That's the important part. This is for narrow body aircraft, which today, I think we can all agree that the manufacturers have gone too far in making the lavs on them unusably small, even for small people onboard these aircraft. They have gone too far. For a user of these lavatories that need accessibility for either wheelchair, or reduced mobility, they are unusable.

There are cases where people are flying and they, on a six-hour flight, and they literally cannot use the lavatory, because it doesn't work for you.

[0:11:53] SM: Yeah. The Delta one is nice. It has basically, a way that the door, again, can flip open wider, so the wheelchair can get in. It's got, I think, four different hand grab rail options. It's got a very large changing/support table that they're rating it up to a 100 pounds, so it's not just for babies. They've got everything as touchless, so flush, toilet raising and lowering, water, hand dryer, all of those things are all touchless. Very interesting concept. Has a lot of potential.

I think, again, we have to see which of these actually meets what airlines are willing to do, meets what the DOT is willing to do, and hits the right targets with the price point and what not, and the LOPA for the cabin.

Some really good concepts. If nothing else, it is very refreshing to see airlines trying these things and actually working to develop, or vendors working to develop them. That's something that had been missing for Jason's help, basically, forever.

[0:12:45] JR: Also on the entertainment side, we're seeing not just airlines, but the manufacturers of the screens getting in on accessibility too, designing into the operating itself accessibility features, like screen readers, larger buttons, and just making it more usable for everyone with reduced, or no vision. Because for the most part, if you don't have vision, you cannot use the entertainment system at all, which isn't great, but now it's being tackled at the manufacturer level, rather than the individual airline level.

[0:13:14] SM: I will just add on to that, the way that they're approaching it is, you, the OS that runs these things isn't great necessarily. I mean, it's fine, but to switch – one of them explained, and I think to switch and just do like, to translate the existing into an accessible mode would be a terrible design experience. You wouldn't get the accessibility you wanted, and it would ruin the airline branding. Instead of going that approach, they are choosing to basically, have a toggle that you just go into accessibility mode, and everything changes.

Instead of trying to make the text bigger, and now the button is the wrong size, you just have new buttons where the text can be the size it needs to be. It's a very interesting approach. They

stopped trying to make the airline branding still fit and have decided to focus entirely on the accessibility.

[0:14:02] IP: Interesting. Yeah. I mean, it's really refreshing to see all of these things really coming into their own now, and hopefully, airlines are positive in their adoption, especially once some of these things actually start getting certified.

[0:14:13] JR: Yes, the hope.

[0:14:15] IP: Let's stay in the aircraft seating realm before we move on to something that I'm curious about, Jason. But tell me more about, quickly, what American Airlines is doing with their A321XLRs?

[0:14:27] JR: Ah, the XLR coming soon. There's a lot of changes happening this week at American Airlines. We'll talk about that in a minute.

[0:14:33] IP: Yeah, we'll get to that in a minute.

[0:14:35] JR: Yeah. But one of them is we know the interior of American's A321XLR being delivered at some point in the near future, but we know it will now have a true premium economy class, which is, I think, a first for US airline on internationally configured narrowbody aircraft, because you do have US airlines sending narrowbodies abroad, typically the 757, though some of them, at least on United and most of the Delta, they have business class, and then they have economy with nothing in the middle. Sometimes they send domestic aircraft abroad, and they sell the recliner seat as premium economy. That's basically what they've done here, but now they have a very premium looking business class, a thing in the middle, and then economy, and it looks like there's something for everyone.

[0:15:21] IP: Excellent.

[0:15:22] SM: Other airlines, other US carriers have announced this. I think this will be the first delivered, though, right?

[0:15:25] JR: First delivered and probably an operation, I believe.

[0:15:29] SM: Delta is signing it, too, for some of their transcon.

[0:15:32] JR: Yeah. It's not totally unique. We've seen ITA do this. We've seen SAS has had this for a few years, but this is on an XLR, so presumably it will fly longer and farther, so that premium economy cabin will be an added bonus, so that's nice.

[0:15:47] IP: Now, I have in the show notes, train seats. But you're at the Aircraft Interior Expo.

[0:15:54] JR: Yes. I mean, I'm looking at my hotel room window right now, and I can see two ice trains, one moving slow, and the other moving very slow, because we're in Hamburg. The seating manufacturers here, they don't just do aircraft things. They do everything, but they really only show you aircraft seat here traditionally. On the Recaro booth, who, if you've been in any higher end cars, or if you bought a gaming chair recently, or several other things, you are probably familiar with Recaro. Apparently, a couple years ago, they bought a Polish manufacturer of train seats, and they punked one of those down at the front of their booth, and I gravitated to that and said, "Oh, train seats." I'll take a seat. I sat down, and I went 'thunk', and it was just incredibly uncomfortable, compared to the literally everything else being shown off at the Recaro booth.

Airlines and the seating manufacturers get a lot of flak for economy seats, for calling them washboards, or pints of wood. Compared to the rail seat that they had on display, those are great. We got some interesting insight from Recaro's seating CEO about why rail seats are traditionally so horrible, or they range from really, really, really bad to mediocre. It's really just down to the lack of competition that Deutsche Bahn doesn't have to compete with anyone for the most part, or Amtrak doesn't have to compete with anyone for the most part, but things are possibly changing.

[0:17:21] SM: That's half of it. The other half is they are engineered to be significantly more vandalism resistant. They don't want people to be able to walk on and slash it with a knife, for example.

[0:17:32] JR: Yes. Typically, your airline passengers are not going onboard in the middle of the night drunk. I mean, maybe they are, but they're probably not going to be damaging the aircraft, because that's a federal offense.

[0:17:41] IP: They don't have a knife, generally.

[0:17:43] SM: They probably won't have a knife is where I thought you were going to go.

[0:17:46] IP: Yeah. That seems the obvious choice here.

[0:17:45] JR: I mean, the PSA stats on hectic things are not the greatest in the world. There are reasons why they are bad. But it seems like, there's a renewed focus on making them less bad. We talk about aircraft seats and you fly on those, if you're flying domestically, or even within Europe, you're on there for two, three hours. But you can be in the same seat on a Deutsche Bahn seat, or in France, or even in the UK for seven hours, or overnight and you could spend far more time in a train seat than an aircraft seat on a comparable trip.

[0:18:20] IP: Well, I'm glad to see that things might be changing. The next item on our list from AIX is a water bottle?

[0:18:27] JR: A water bottle.

[0:18:29] SM: Not the water bottle. The water bottle filler.

[0:18:32] IP: Oh.

[0:18:34] JR: Makes more sense now, right?

[0:18:35] IP: It does.

[0:18:36] SM: I would argue that my favorite amenity in an airport is the, in fact, the water bottle filler.

[0:18:40] IP: I love a good water bottle filler.

[0:18:42] SM: I was trying to log in this week, it wasn't working. I actually called it in and they're like, "Oh, wow. Yes, we'll send someone right over."

[0:18:46] JR: We'll put her right at the top of the list.

[0:18:48] SM: See, I got to give them credit. I was talking to actual facilities management and they've usually fixed things when I've called it in.

[0:18:54] JR: More airports need to attend to their water fountains that have the little status indicators –

[0:18:58] SM: The bright red.

[0:18:58] JR: - for the filter, where it's like, yellow or bright red. How long has this been bright red? There's an indicator for reason. It should never be red.

[0:19:04] IP: We installed this a long time ago.

[0:19:05] JR: I agree. Moving on. Safrn in their booth was a demonstration of a crystal cabin award, I believe, finalists. Recognize that the industry is a pretty cool concept of a filtered water solution. One of the challenges with drinking water on planes is the tanks get disgusting for potable water. Basically, the world has said, don't drink that. You're flying on this giant tank around. You want to be able to use it, but instead we have plastic bottles onboard of water. The idea here is a combination of physical and UV filtering to make sure that the water is clean as it comes out. It's chilled. It's all of those things.

That part of it is behind the scenes embedded into the galley wall. Then the other part of it though, it looks like just a little dispenser sitting on the wall. You can walk on a special, I got a long-haul flight, the idea would be that passengers could walk up and refill their bottle directly. There's a version of it that's fully integrated into the galley, and so the water –

[0:20:04] JR: Well, the lavatory.

[0:20:06] SM: - that they have.

[0:20:06] JR: Lavatory.

[0:20:07] SM: But those water spigots could have filtered water, instead of the stuff that is coming out of the tank.

[0:20:12] JR: Yeah. The same water –

[0:20:13] IP: Interesting.

[0:20:13] JR: - that they put the placard in the lav saying, “Don't drink this water. You might die,” presumably, it is the same water, but now it's filtered. It's a nice way to reduce single use plastics, because we're getting to the limit of how much plastic can we remove from the aircraft. Removing 178 individual bottles of water. Plastic bottles of water is probably a good thing. It was just pretty cool, because bottle filler, or a cup of water dispenser on an aircraft is not a novel thing. Older aircraft had that and still have that. There are probably 747s out there flying around that still have a water filling station that you should not use. Now, what's old is new again.

[0:20:52] IP: Then finally, from Hamburg, gentlemen, tell me, what have you heard of AI this week?

[0:21:00] SM: Far too many things.

[0:21:01] IP: Remember, we are a family friendly podcast.

[0:21:04] SM: Yes, but are we AI friendly?

[0:21:06] JR: No.

[0:21:06] IP: Well, we'll see at the end of the show.

[0:21:08] SM: There were a lot of things. There's a lot of talk AI is going to save the world. It's going to design things that we don't even know exist yet, so we don't need to worry about the fact that we don't have enough spare land to grow corn to make SAFs and stuff like that. But putting that challenge aside, we'll say, one of the things that was presented in one of the seminar presentations on Monday at the show was the idea of we can use facial recognition to understand the mood of a passenger. We've seen this before in many applications, but –

[0:21:39] JR: That's fine. We haven't gotten to the bad bit yet.

[0:21:41] IP: All right.

[0:21:42] SM: We're going to use that to assign seats. Apparently, there's a way that you can look at someone's face, judge their mood and decide that they need the stink shield.

[0:21:50] JR: Yeah. Stink shield being –

[0:21:52] SM: Seat 29B, if I remember correctly. This is a old, old go look up stink shield. There's a stink shield ladder. It's a very old, avgeeky lore.

[0:22:02] JR: Seat next to the lav.

[0:22:03] SM: Seat next to the lav. It's a good story to read.

[0:22:06] JR: This is a terrible, terrible, terrible idea, because you're going to get someone assigned to the last row middle seat and they're going to say, "What did I do? What did you interpret off my face to punish me with this seat?" A terrible, terrible, so terrible idea.

[0:22:21] SM: Also, most seats are assigned in advance. What could my face look like to let you know that I want a window, or an aisle?

[0:22:26] JR: It's not even AI. Facial recognition and reading sentiment is not a new thing.

[0:22:31] IP: That sounds like an easily gameable solution. If you know you're going to have your picture taken, just smile. If you smile hard enough, do you get a first-class seat?

[0:22:41] JR: It's the stupidest thing. The stupidest thing.

[0:22:43] SM: Hang on, Ian. I've got a theory here. We're going up with Mr. Moneybag's monocle, you definitely got a first-class seat.

[0:22:50] IP: Ooh, I like it. Top hat, you get to fly the plane. If you show up in a pilot's uniform, you get to fly the plane? None of these makes any sense.

[0:23:01] JR: No. It's profoundly stupid.

[0:23:05] IP: Oh, and that's why it's a trade show that showcases things that could happen, not necessarily will. This takes us to the end of the list that you gave me for Hamburg. Is there anything else you guys want to hit on before we move on to what else has happened in the industry this week?

[0:23:20] JR: Nah, we got enough other stuff to cover, I think.

[0:23:23] IP: All right. Yeah, I think we do. We'll come back to Hamburg because you had some interesting conversations at AIX, but not necessarily AIX related. Last week, we brought you the story of Singapore Airlines flight SQ321, which suffered an extreme turbulence event, shared the data that we had at the time. Today, the 29th of May, the Singapore Transport Safety Investigation Bureau released its findings in a preliminary report, and now we have some actual G-force numbers to go along with the data that we had.

The Transport Safety Investigation Bureau confirms the timing that we presented from the ADS-B data. At 07:49 UTC on the 21st of May 2024, the aircraft encountered extreme turbulence over Myanmar at 37,000 feet. We also now know that the turbulence began with fluctuating vertical accelerations between 0.44 G and 1.57 G for about 19 seconds. Then there was an uncommanded increase in altitude, where the aircraft reached 37,362 feet. This is all data from the flight data recorder and the cockpit voice recorder.

The autopilot, which was engaged at the time, pitched the aircraft back down towards the selected altitude of 37,000 feet. The pilots also observed an uncommanded increase in air speed, which they arrested by extending the speed brakes. As they were managing the air speed, one of the pilots called out that the fastened seatbelt sign should be turned on. That was at 07:49:32, six seconds later. The seatbelt sign had been off. Six seconds later at 07:49:40, the aircraft experienced a rapid change in G, as recorded vertical acceleration decreased from positive 1.35 G to negative 1.5 G within 0.6 seconds.

[0:25:34] JR: Wow.

[0:25:34] IP: The TSB says, this is, "Likely resulted in the occupants who were not belted up to become airborne."

[0:25:40] JR: Yeah, that was proven to be true.

[0:25:42] IP: Then one second later, the aircraft vertical acceleration changed from minus 1.5 G to positive 1.5 G. Whoever went up, came back down. This occurred over 4.6 seconds in an altitude drop of 178 feet from 37,362 feet to 37,184 feet. This is the injury sequence, basically, this 4.6 second duration, extreme rate of change.

[0:26:14] SM: A pair of 3G swings in four seconds is –

[0:26:17] JR: Dramatic.

[0:26:18] SM: - incredible.

[0:26:19] JR: Yeah. It's –

[0:26:20] SM: Unfathomable. There's a lot of –

[0:26:22] JR: Yeah. It's crazy how this must have actually come out of nowhere, if they didn't even have the seatbelt sign on. But then the crew, in that initial bump, had the awareness to

say, "Hey, the seatbelt sign's not on. Let's turn it on." That's pretty great. Not that it really mattered at that point, because it was too late. This all happened, I think, way faster than we probably would have thought before the report.

[0:26:45] IP: The first-time stamp in the preliminary report is 07:49:21. They put the seatbelt sign on 07:49:32, or the pilot says, to put the seatbelt sign on at 07:49:32. Then at 07:49:40, so eight seconds later, that's when the huge swings in vertical gravitational force.

[0:27:07] JR: Maybe there's an actual use case for AI here in the aircraft, where the aircraft could simply sense, "Hey, it's getting bumpy, I should probably turn the seatbelt on automatically, instead of waiting for a pilot who may be busy otherwise to manually flip the switch."

[0:27:19] SM: We call that data analytics, or machine learning and not AI, please.

[0:27:23] JR: Sure. Whatever you want to call it.

[0:27:25] IP: Absolutely.

[0:27:25] JR: But it seems like that might be a good idea. This is really all we get from the preliminary report, which is actually quite a bit of information. But we also have confirmation now that my rant last week was correct, because the Transportation Safety Board in Singapore says, approximately 17 minutes after the turbulence event, the pilots initiated a "normal controlled descent from 37,000 feet and the aircraft reached 31,000 feet four minutes later."

[0:27:56] JR: Well, you can begin a new rant, because apparently, there are some articles being published in the last few hours saying, that the aircraft experienced a change in gravitational forces, as if gravity changed and then made the aircraft get bumpy, which I don't think is quite how it works.

[0:28:13] SM: That's how we're interpreting G-force.

[0:28:14] JR: Yes.

[0:28:14] SM: Gravity force, Ian. Don't you know?

[0:28:17] IP: Okay.

[0:28:17] JR: That's not how any of this works.

[0:28:19] IP: Yeah, there's the title of the podcast. That's not how any of this works. That's what we know so far. We will keep on after this and wait for the final report, which will come out probably in about a year. There was another turbulence event on the 26th of May, so just a few days later. Qatar Flight 17 was in route from Doha to Dublin when it experienced a bout of severe turbulence over Turkey. In that, 12 people, six crew and six passengers were injured. Those people were attended to by medics on arrival in Dublin some hours later.

[0:29:00] JR: Wasn't one of the crew members severely injured on this flight, too?

[0:29:04] IP: I can't recall the exact number and I don't have in front of me, but there were transports to the hospital.

[0:29:10] JR: They just kept on going to Dublin, like Istanbul to Dublin is not a particularly short flight, and they just kept on going?

[0:29:17] IP: They flew all the way to Dublin and were met by medics in Dublin, who assessed some of the passengers and crew and then took a few of them to the hospital.

[0:29:25] JR: Okay.

[0:29:26] IP: That's an interesting one to me.

[0:29:27] JR: You don't want to second guess a flight crew –

[0:29:29] IP: Sure. We don't know what happened.

[0:29:30] JR: I'm sure they were in contact with medical professionals over a med link, or whatever, but it just seems odd.

[0:29:37] IP: It'll be interesting to learn more about that particular event as well. Japan Airlines is in a bit of trouble with Japanese regulators. The Japanese regulator says that multiple breaches of regulation have shown a distinct lack of safety awareness at the carrier. This is on top of the fatal accident involving a Japan Airlines A350 at the beginning of the year. That obviously tops the list. But the JCAB also points out a number of runway incursions, including when a JAL aircraft crossed the runway at SeaTac.

There was another one where a JAL flight entered a different taxiway, while another aircraft was on final approach. There was one where it passed the stop line and there was also a alcohol-related incident in which Japan Airlines had to cancel flight from Dallas after a pilot “behaved in an inappropriate manner, because of excessive drinking two days prior.”

[0:30:44] JR: Huh. Okay.

[0:30:45] SM: I wonder if that means he was arrested.

[0:30:47] JR: Yeah, two days prior. That's a long time before the flight.

[0:30:52] IP: Yeah.

[0:30:53] SM: Was he arrested and was unavailable? You think the hangover would clear in two days. But if it's a behavioral thing and there was a police incident, maybe not.

[0:31:03] IP: I don't know. This was all part of an administrative warning due to a series of safety incidents. The JCAB saying, “Hey, JAL. You need to –”

[0:31:14] SM: I would say, can JAL and United form an alliance?

[0:31:16] JR: Yeah. It sounds equivalent to what the FAA said to United, which is apparently, still going on. No one's really, for sure at this point. But it sounds like JAL and United should have a meeting and discuss like, how did we get here?

[0:31:29] SM: How do we keep on going though?

[0:31:31] JR: Ooh, yeah. What's next?

[0:31:34] IP: Let's stay in Dallas and talk once again about American Airlines. This time, not about seats, but who's no longer sitting in a particular seat. Because American's Chief Commercial Officer, Vasu Raja, is out after the airline flatly saying last week, he's not out. Well, now he is.

[0:31:52] JR: Yes, there were some very prominent rumors saying he was taking sabbatical, or he was leaving, and then American was very insistent and saying, "No, no, no. He's just working remotely. It's fine. It's fine. He'll be back soon." Then suddenly, last night, or during the day, US time, American put out a very hasty, not a hasty, but very short press release saying, he's out. Someone's replacing him. You know that line from the Simpsons where Millhouse's father says, "That's it. After all these years, thank you. Goodbye." Then the boss says, "I don't recall saying thank you." They didn't even thank him, or wish him well, or anything. Goodbye.

[0:32:30] IP: The statement was so short. I mean, I can just read it right now. "American Airlines Group today announced that Vasu Raja, Executive Vice President, Chief Commercial Officer, will depart the airline in June." Then it just lists his responsibilities since 2022. Then it announces that his current responsibilities will hand over to Stephen Johnson, Vice Chair and Chief Strategy Officer, effective immediately.

[0:32:56] SM: I would say, there's two things. One, he's technically still an employee, but has no responsibilities, all right. Everything has been turned off, but we haven't fired you yet, because I'm sure there's some rule about how much warning you're supposed to get. That is bad. Also, the, will be departing the company, that is not a voluntary thing.

[0:33:14] JR: No. Not only is he is being fired and in the interim until they can, I guess, legally fire him.

[0:33:20] IP: He's got three days.

[0:33:21] JR: He's being placed in the basement, away from anything or he can do any damage.

[0:33:26] SM: In fact, he's just told to stay home or wherever he was in sabbatical. But anyway, it's bad news. Also, accompanying the statement was an updated financial guidance bit.

[0:33:35] JR: It's bad.

[0:33:36] SM: Basically, revenue wasn't going to be great for Q2, but it's now going to be, I think, TRASM, total RASM is going to be down 4% more than they thought it was going to be. 2% to 4% worse than they were expecting. Costs are going down too, but not enough, and so, margins are down.

[0:33:54] JR: This isn't a business focused podcast, but basically, he's made some very questionable decisions about the course and the strategic alignment of the airline. Most recently saying, that if you do not book through channels that we approve of, that partner with us, you will not be awarded a advantage miles. Really short notice to the industry to have that happen. People were not happy about it.

[0:34:18] SM: They delayed the implementation a little.

[0:34:20] JR: A little bit, but not by much. American was losing customers, and people were booking elsewhere, because they don't want to put up with that hassle.

[0:34:28] SM: I would argue, it's not just the personal travel that Jason's alluded to, but they gutted their global sales business, travel agency approach, basically demanding that everybody work directly with them and not through third parties, because arguably, that's cost savings.

Beyond the cost savings, in theory, you can sell better to those passengers, because you have the ability to do all of the NBC options of selling extra seats, selling bundles, all that stuff more.

[0:34:54] JR: Which is important and needs to happen.

[0:34:56] SM: It needs to happen, but the industry has not moved fast enough to get there through the –

[0:35:01] JR: He tried to accelerate it.

[0:35:02] SM: He tried to force.

[0:35:04] JR: It was an unforced error.

[0:35:07] SM: He tried to push a square peg into a round hole.

[0:35:09] JR: Yeah. You have to admire that, because otherwise, maybe the industry never gets to that point. But it seems like it. Well, at some point, but you can't punish your customers to get to that point. They were using the stick approach, not the carrot, because the carrot hasn't worked in the past, but the stick was too big and they were hitting passengers too hard with that stick. He was shown the door.

[0:35:30] IP: Yeah. We'll see who takes over next. Stephen Johnson stepping into the role in an interim basis and he will help lead the search for a new chief commercial officer. We'll see who gets that job. Some things to finalize this particular episode of the podcast, the C919 will make its first commercial flight outside mainland China. Chinese Eastern sending a charter flight from Hong Kong to Shanghai. The first time the aircraft will make money outside of mainland China.

[0:35:58] SM: Were the prior Hong Kong flights charter/tourists?

[0:36:02] IP: No. Those were non-commercial. Those were as part of the, “Hey, look at my new airplane tour.” Then finally, I thought this was interesting, and then you guys made it even more interesting, because of who you talk to. Egypt Air in its financial filing –

[0:36:17] JR: I was wondering where you were going with that, because we're not interesting people.

[0:36:20] IP: No. No, you're certainly not. Egypt Air ditched the A220, because the engines didn't work. That's not really news, but we now have official confirmation. Those engines were recently serviced and they've sold the entire fleet to lessor Azorra, and they'll move on. Jason and Seth, you had a conversation with airBaltic CEO, Martin Gauss, this week. He had some things to say about the A220 and its engine situation.

[0:36:51] JR: Yeah. Just to clarify, we think you may have said A320. It's, of course, A220.

[0:36:56] IP: Oh, 220. My apologies if I said A320.

[0:36:57] JR: I mean, the 320 is also having issues, which Martin Gauss actually tells us. It's not as bad on the A220. It's much worse on the 320. In an interview that Seth had arranged, I had asked at the end of our time, how's the situation going with Pratt on the A220s? His response was just, "Oof. Yeah."

[0:37:17] IP: I mean, that's about as good a response.

[0:37:18] SM: I mean, being there, he could have said much worse things.

[0:37:20] IP: He could've said much worse things.

[0:37:22] JR: He did say, it is improving. It is getting better, but it is going to get worse again before it gets better, due to just the dynamics of the industry ramping up for the summer schedule, not having enough engines on wing. It's taking too long. They're a small airline, which we know. There's a very big company above them dangling these engines and they're a small airline. It's tricky, but this is clearly not a situation that's getting resolved, or better anytime soon. I mean, when the CEO comment is literally, "Oof", and it's on the record, you know it's a problem.

[0:37:56] SM: I would say, his comment was, Pratt is what it is. He actually referenced them as a large American military industrial complex company that happens to make engines, which not wrong. He certainly has a view of that there in a way that was particularly interesting. Yeah, he went on a little bit about how he felt that the massive company was taking advantage of how small they are and not being willing to pay compensation at the levels that were implied and things like that. No idea what the actual outcome of that will be.

[0:38:29] IP: This is interesting, because this jives with what we've heard from other folks that have been familiar with negotiations around engine compensation and getting the aircraft fixed. Because what we've talked about previously, and I think this was a couple episodes ago now, where companies that are tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny, that only have a few Pratt-powered aircraft and without them, they can't run their airline, those are getting fixed. The airlines that have a ton of Pratt engines that are huge airlines and longtime customers that are going to buy a hundred or more planes, those are getting fixed. But the airlines that are in the middle, like airBaltic, or Air New Zealand, that they can scrape by without those particular aircraft and maybe they can go a little longer, they're not seeing the help that they feel they deserve.

[0:39:23] JR: Yeah. Interestingly, airBaltic will get to that point where they are that big airline that cannot be ignored. They are not quite there now, but they have orders at least now for a hundred.

[0:39:34] SM: They'll be at a hundred aircraft. They're 50 by the end of this year, and they'll be at a 100 by 2029 end of the year is the plan, assuming Airbus is still around.

[0:39:41] IP: Wow. There you go.

[0:39:43] JR: Yes.

[0:39:43] SM: That's basically a plan a month for a long time. This is not quite the pace they're getting delivered in. The next two years are a little slower, but it's a lot.

[0:39:51] IP: I think the pace is a little slower for every airline at the moment. But interesting to see what happens when they do have that many aircraft. Gentlemen enjoy Hamburg for the rest of the week. You're off tomorrow, I believe?

[0:40:06] SM: Friday.

[0:40:06] JR: Friday. Yeah, one more day of the show and then maybe Seth will be reunited by his – with his bag by the end –

[0:40:12] IP: With his bag.

[0:40:13] JR: We'll go celebrate with a drink and take the bag out, I guess, and come to dinner.

[0:40:17] SM: You're not going to take me to a bar and spill beer all over my suitcase with the clothes that I've been waiting a week for.

[0:40:22] JR: They're inside the bag. It's fine. It'll be fine.

[0:40:25] IP: Well, I wish you both the best of luck with that. Seth, I hope you get your bag back sooner rather than later. I'm headed back from Stockholm to Chicago tomorrow. By the time the podcast comes out, I will be home, and we'll talk more about that on next week's episode. Seth Miller, thank you so much. Seth's work can be found across the wide Internet, but mostly at paex.aero. Go check that out. For Jason and myself, this has been episode 270 of AvTalk. Thank you all so very much for listening.

[0:40:59] SM: Take care.

[0:41:00] JR: Thanks for listening.

[END]