

**EPISODE 297**

[EPISODE]

**[0:00:07] IP:** Hello and welcome to episode 297 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as a few times now with my colleague, Chris Lomas, who is standing in for Jason Rabinowitz today, who's, I think as we're recording in Stockholm, Sweden on a CRJ-550. I think we're getting the better deal of it today.

**[0:00:32] CL:** Someone's got to be.

**[0:00:33] IP:** Yeah. 6 AM flight out of LaGuardia, I think. Though, don't feel bad for Jason, because as we talked about on last episode, he spent the week in Taiwan and Japan. I feel zero

—

**[0:00:45] CL:** Very little sympathy.

**[0:00:47] IP:** No. No sympathy, whatsoever. But he'll be back next week. But Chris was thankfully happy to join. I didn't have to twist his arm too hard. Chris, welcome back to the podcast. It's always great to have you.

**[0:00:58] CL:** Yeah, great to be here again, and for the first time in the same room.

**[0:01:00] IP:** Exactly.

**[0:01:01] CL:** We've ever been in the same building, in fact, all the same country.

**[0:01:04] IP:** That's true. Every time you're on the show, you're well and truly in the woods somewhere. Yeah. Chris and I, along with most of the rest of the FlightRadar24 crew, are in Stockholm this week, having our annual get together. We're doing all sorts of, I believe, you were doing some training today that involve a whole mess of Legos.

**[0:01:25] CL:** You'll be surprised what you can learn with Lego.

**[0:01:27] IP:** There you go. That's good to hear. We're headed to Curling later. We've got the annual Yule Board later, along with all sorts of good year-end wrap-up stuff. Let's start there. Let's wrap up the year as far as FlightRadar24 is concerned and the work that you've done this year. What stands out in your mind?

**[0:01:47] CL:** I guess, two things really for me. First of all, is seeing the A321XLR coming to service. I think we've been very fortunate to follow that aircraft from very early on in its journey. There's some earlier episodes of AvTalk where I've talked about it. We also spoke to Gary O'Donnell, the head of the program. Really interesting. Of course, we joined a test flight last year too, which was incredible. It's really satisfying to see that journey come to fruition.

I guess, the other thing, which we haven't shared publicly yet, is an experience that I had a few weeks ago, courtesy of our friends at Airbus. We took flight on the Airbus A400M and flew around the middle of Spain with the door open.

**[0:02:27] IP:** No one tossed you out the back.

**[0:02:29] CL:** No one tossed me out the back. That was a struggle, but I prevailed. So, we're good.

**[0:02:34] IP:** I'm glad. I'm glad. Look for that video in the coming weeks.

**[0:02:38] CL:** Indeed.

**[0:02:39] IP:** We can also preview what I think – we tend to have some of the best video content that we produce. It happens at the end of the year. Our colleague, Gabriel is currently in Antarctica. He flew down on the A340 earlier in the week and has been flying Basler BT-67s. None of us here are jealous. I would never say that, but we're a little jealous.

**[0:03:04] CL:** With in an interesting range of locations for the supporting. You and I are in the room together for the first time. Jason is on a CRJ. Gabriel is in Antarctica.

**[0:03:14] IP:** Yes. Gabe is far, far away.

**[0:03:15] CL:** All we need is a member of the team on the moon for the next episode and we've got the whole shebang.

**[0:03:19] IP:** Well, anything's possible at this point.

**[0:03:20] CL:** Hello, SpaceX. We are available for –

**[0:03:24] IP:** For a moon launch. Stay tuned for those videos as well. Let's turn our attention to Poland, where we started the week in a most unexpected manner. That was with a young couple in love, the soon to be groom coming up with a very interesting way to propose marriage. He rented a helicopter and they flew the flight path that said, "Marry me." Included a heart. Then he had his girlfriend pull out her phone and check FlightRadar24.

**[0:03:56] CL:** Which, I think, means technically we proposed to that.

**[0:03:59] IP:** That's what I'm saying. This actually counts as the second time that we have proposed marriage to someone using FlightRadar24, or the first time that they saw the proposal. Last October, there was a couple in the UK that used one of the Emirates A380 flights out of London as a special message to propose. She said, yes, on both accounts.

**[0:04:22] CL:** Both accounts. Yes.

**[0:04:23] IP:** She said, yes. That would be the worst.

**[0:04:25] CL:** It will be an expensive rejection.

**[0:04:27] IP:** Yes. Very, very expensive.

**[0:04:29] CL:** I was thinking how it must be a lot easier to do these things in a helicopter, particularly where you're writing out actual letters, because in a fixed wing airplane, that's a lot of turns.

**[0:04:37] IP:** You would be flying awhile. Yeah.

**[0:04:38] CL:** Yeah. Unless, you're doing it in an extra 300 or something and you're just whipping it around the sky like the Red Bull air race. That's a little bit easier.

**[0:04:45] IP:** That'd be fun, too. Yeah. The happy couple. We don't know when the date is, but we assume everyone at FlightRadar24 is invited to the wedding.

**[0:04:52] CL:** Oh, a 100%.

**[0:04:54] IP:** Other things where thankfully they have said yes, the ITA Airways-Lufthansa deal has officially been greenlit by the European Commission. That allows Lufthansa to take a 41% stake in ITA Airways and eventually, probably end up owning the whole thing outright the way things are going now. The competition that acquired the remedy slots is what we thought it was going to be all along, but they've beneficially approved, so easyJet acquires the remedy slots for the short-haul flying and Air France KLM and IAG. The other two major airline groups in Europe acquire the long-haul remedy slots out of Italy. easyJet has wasted no time and said, "Okay, we'll base some aircraft there." Five aircraft will be based out of Milan and three aircraft will be based out of Rome. It's good to finally get this done.

**[0:05:52] CL:** Over the line. I guess, easyJet, pretty well established in Italy is a stance. I think they've got a good experience of operating in both of those bases. But I'm pretty sure they're both easyJet bases.

**[0:06:01] IP:** Yeah. More aircraft and off we go. We'll see how it ends up working out as Lufthansa Group tries to fold in ITA Airways. As Jason mentioned a few weeks ago, we're in a battle to get the Alitalia brand back. We will not rest.

**[0:06:16] CL:** We all want to see it.

**[0:06:17] IP:** We will not rest until the Alitalia brand is back.

**[0:06:19] CL:** What would be really awesome is if they could bring the Alitalia uniforms back, because I don't know if you've ever seen an Alitalia uniform, but there's a lot going on. They have very large hats and very busy. That's a great way.

**[0:06:30] IP:** They are busy. Also, bringing back the old Alitalia China from the old 747 days. Just bring back the 1970s back. Yeah. Just bring back the 1970s. Problem solved.

**[0:06:40] CL:** Oh, we love to see it.

**[0:06:41] IP:** Where are we going next? We're going to Russia. Well, we're not going to Russia, but we're going to talk about Russia. In August, the Russian government changed the law that for the first time, allowed the wet leasing of aircraft. Which up until the announcement that they were changing the law to allow wet leasing of aircraft, I had assumed that it was not illegal.

**[0:07:05] CL:** I was also not aware of this.

**[0:07:07] IP:** This was one of the things where the making it legal was the surprise.

**[0:07:11] CL:** Absolutely. I guess, the moral of the story is if you don't like a law, just change it.

**[0:07:16] IP:** There you go.

**[0:07:16] CL:** Simple as that.

**[0:07:17] IP:** Well, we'll talk about why that's difficult later in the show. As far as this goes, well, it's Russia. They wanted it. They got it. Aeroflot will begin wet leasing three A330s from iFly. It's not clear exactly which A330s those will be yet, but it sounds like the A330s will be used mostly for trips to the far east, far eastern airports in Russia. Long-haul domestic flying for them.

In Pakistan, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency has said, "Okay, we're satisfied. You've cleaned up your act. Your safety management system is fine, and your airlines can begin operating back to Europe." This comes after the 2022 crash in Karachi and the subsequent

scandal where we found out that some upwards of half the pilot's licenses in Pakistan were fraudulent.

**[0:08:17] CL:** It's incredible, as someone who has a commercial pilot's license, and to think how difficult it was to get a legitimate pilot's license, I can't figure out whether it would be easier, or harder to fake one. I don't think you can just go to Microsoft Word, print it off, fold it into half and then into three and be done with it. But maybe that's how it works in Pakistan.

**[0:08:36] IP:** Clipart. Clipart. Got to use some clipart.

**[0:08:38] CL:** Got to be.

**[0:08:39] IP:** Definitely.

**[0:08:40] CL:** I guess, the windings would be a giveaway, wouldn't it?

**[0:08:42] IP:** Yeah, it really would. The little cartoon-shaped aircraft, use it as the seal.

**[0:08:48] CL:** If [inaudible 0:08:48] has a smiley face, it's a fake pilot's license.

**[0:08:52] IP:** See, that's a good way to tell. Does it have the raised lettering? If it does, you're okay.

**[0:08:57] CL:** Legit.

**[0:08:57] IP:** This affects Pakistan International Airlines and Airblue. Both of those airlines can now begin offering services, though neither has, as of today, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December, announced that they are starting services back up. Level, the airline that was not an airline but was within an airline and then got moved to within another airline and then was moved to a third airline, but became an airline but was never quite an airline, is now going to be an actual airline. You followed all that, right?

**[0:09:28] CL:** Yeah, I think so. I think that was airline to the power of eight.

[0:09:31] IP: Something like that.

[0:09:31] CL: Something like that.

[0:09:32] IP: Yes. It wasn't as convoluted as Joon, the lovely Air France invention that should have never happened.

[0:09:39] CL: Having seen the movie, I think everything named Joon seems to just be generally quite convoluted.

[0:09:45] IP: Fair enough. Level's going, have its own AOC, or has received its own AOC. It's no longer under Iberia's tutelage. Technically their AOC, but they were operating flights that could have been Iberia flights but maybe weren't necessarily a good fit for Iberia. It's the market segmentation run amok. But as soon as they get approval to operate to the United States, Chile and Argentina on their own, they plan on beginning service to New York, Boston, Miami, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Buenos Aires and Santiago. I mean, all of the destinations make perfect sense for who Level is and where they're flying from. Look for some – they're not necessarily new flights, because they've operated them in the past, but they'll be more Levelly –

[0:10:36] CL: More definitively Level. Yes.

[0:10:37] IP: Yes. There you go.

[0:10:39] CL: Maybe they'll be flown to sea level. Maybe that's the –

[0:10:42] IP: In a Chronoplan?

[0:10:43] CL: Yeah.

[0:10:44] IP: Ooh.

[0:10:44] CL: I mean, we wanted to see them come back for a long time.

**[0:10:46] IP:** That would be fun.

**[0:10:47] CL:** This would be a great opportunity.

**[0:10:50] IP:** Oh. There you go back to Aeroflot wet leasing aircraft, or watercraft.

**[0:10:52] CL:** Quite literally a wet lease.

**[0:10:53] IP:** Yes, exactly. Perfect. I like it. Speaking of water, water and other things, including fire retardant, this is an interesting one. I'm surprised it hadn't happened before now, but I guess, there's a ton of studying that you need to do to make sure that it's feasible. Neptune Aviation, the Montana-based wildfire fighting company and Aerotec & Concept, which is a French company, are partnering on the first Airbus A319 firefighting jet. That'll be interesting. I'm excited to see what they come up with. Neptune currently operates a fleet of BAE-146s, which Chris, you are pretty familiar with.

**[0:11:34] CL:** Something of an aficionado.

**[0:11:35] IP:** An aficionado. Yeah.

**[0:11:36] CL:** Of the 146. Yeah. It's one of a – it's a personal favorite, I would say. I've had the privilege recently to climb around a few special use 146s, including one in the UK, which was really interesting. Hopefully, we might get to do some work with those guys in the future and show you that. I think, I've been two minds about this, because I'm also a bit of a fan of the A319. I think it's a good, stable platform. I'd be very interested to see it used in this capacity. I'd love to see how the conversion process works. We think about passenger to freighter. How do we do passenger to firefighter? That's what I'd like to see. I think the 319 could prove to be a really good platform for that. It's a shame, perhaps, to see a few more 146s leaving the sky, but we move.

**[0:12:15] IP:** Yeah. I will say that Neptune says that they're going to have a mixed fleet. They haven't said what the mix will be and how long the 146s will stay around, but they're not going



away yet. Also, it's going to take a few years to get even the first A319 into service there. They're planning for introducing this in 2027. It's still a few years off. The A319 will carry 4,500 gallons of fire retardant and because of larger fuel tanks, it will have a longer range and longer time on station than the 146. That's pretty interesting.

I mean, we've talked about it over the past couple of weeks with Colson operating their 737 fireliners and getting Part 125 certification, so they could carry passengers. This seems like it would be something along the same lines, where you can bring firefighters with you in the A319, so maybe you leave some seats in, but then again, you have to start running an airline. I'm not sure if Neptune wants to do that. But it seems like, it would certainly be an option.

**[0:13:13] CL:** Feels like an adjacent kind of situation.

**[0:13:16] IP:** The one thing that we don't know yet is where the A319s are coming from. That'll be a big question. It sounds like, Airbus is onboard with supporting the project. I think that's a big first step to making sure the aircraft are cared for in the long term. That'll be fun to see. The A319 just climbing hills and dropping fire retardant and all sorts of good, fun stuff. That twin engine large air tanker thing is the – as the DC 9s reach the end of their useful life, and the 747 sadly is gone and has been converted just back to a regular freighter. That'll be interesting to see.

**[0:13:54] CL:** On the topic of firefighters, I've recently learned that the MSA 400 is going to be made available with firefighting capability. As I understand it, it's a fairly simple process of you fly your A400 in still, you stick it into the hangar. It takes about a couple of days, I think, to convert it. Really fast process. It's quite modular. Then they fly back it out and you've got a firefighter.

**[0:14:15] IP:** Oh, cool. The C-130 has that as well. What is it? It's literally called the modular aerial firefighting system. It's basically a shipping container that you –

**[0:14:24] CL:** Slightly.

**[0:14:25] IP:** Yeah, you plug into a C-130.

**[0:14:27] CL:** It's like putting an AA battery into a TV remote.

**[0:14:29] IP:** Exactly. Exactly. If only it were that simple. That's cool to hear that Airbus is working on that. Hong Kong's third runway is officially open.

**[0:14:38] CL:** Hooray.

**[0:14:40] IP:** That only took 10 years, but it only took 10 years. Having been a veteran of the Chicago runway wars of the early 2000s, getting a runway built on land is no small feat. Getting another runway built on –

**[0:14:56] CL:** On the ocean.

**[0:14:57] IP:** - an island that doesn't yet exist, all the more impressive. Major capacity boost to Hong Kong, and they're up and running. Hopefully, the maps will be updated by Google and Apple very soon, so that we can begin showing that properly and no water landings.

**[0:15:13] CL:** Yeah. Please, don't tweet us.

**[0:15:14] IP:** Yeah. Exactly. We promise, we'll update them as soon as humanly possible. Korean Air says that its merger with Asiana will close before the end of December. They've given up a bunch of things. Asiana's cargo business has been sold off. They've given up some routes to T'way Air. The European competition regulators have said, "Okay. Yup, that's good. We're satisfied now." The U.S. is expected to give its approval and that should be the final international regulator that needs to prove anything before they can close the deal. Korean Air says that they are confident that that will happen before the end of this year.

No word yet on if this week's events in Seoul will have any impact on that, nor is there any word if this week's events in Seoul will impact SAS launching its Seoul service next year. Though, it's funny how you always find a local angle to a story. We're sitting in Stockholm. The Swedish Prime Minister was supposed to visit South Korea this week. That's not going to happen.

**[0:16:18] CL:** That's not going to happen. There may not be a Prime Minister next week.

**[0:16:21] IP:** Well, or a President. Yeah, yeah. Exactly. We'll keep an eye on that. But things seem to be, as far as the aviation angle is concerned, things –

**[0:16:28] CL:** It felt like a pretty quick flash of life on the aviation side. Yeah.

**[0:16:31] IP:** Yeah. We'll follow that in case there's anything else to report. We now come to the point of the program where I get to apologize to all of our listeners for not knowing how to read.

**[0:16:42] CL:** Nobody's perfect.

**[0:16:43] IP:** The Royal New Zealand Air Force has indeed operated C-130Hs for decades. They've flown to Antarctica for decades. What I got wrong was that they took delivery of their first C-130J. That's the first time that particular aircraft has gone downtown to Antarctica.

**[0:16:43] CL:** Right. We're talking about the J to Antarctica. First time. Simple as that.

**[0:17:11] IP:** Exactly. I spent more time last week being wrong. I do want to say, thank you to all of the people who emailed us this week. I'm pretty sure most of New Zealand listens to the podcast were told about it and decided to write in. Thank you everyone from New Zealand and a few people not from New Zealand, who apparently, have a very strong interest in C-130s, letting us know that –

**[0:17:34] CL:** Two highly engage communities, which we've –

**[0:17:37] IP:** Exactly. We've Venn diagrammed them.

**[0:17:37] CL:** - we have to reconnect with. Yeah.

**[0:17:39] IP:** Exactly. Glad to clear that one up. Regarding the conversation last week we had about the Swift Air Crash, we had someone from Flight Calibration Services write in, who mentioned that – in our discussion, we talked about how the Polish Air Navigation Services Agency sent one of their calibration aircraft to Vilnius right after the crash to perform an IOS

inspection. The aircraft was headed there anyway and they mentioned that the mission had changed following the crash. Someone from Flight Calibration Services, which does the same thing on a contract basis for other organizations, mostly in Europe, mentioned that this is procedure any time a crash occurs and that aircraft is using the instrument landing service.

**[0:18:34] CL:** Right. Even if it's not.

**[0:18:35] IP:** An instrument landing system, or any instrument approach.

**[0:18:37] CL:** Got you. Even if the instrument landing system, or whichever instrument system is isn't directly implicated, it still has to be –

**[0:18:44] IP:** They will come into calibration just to make sure that it did not have anything to do with it. It's working properly. It's working exactly as it should and they can rule that out.

**[0:18:53] CL:** Got you. Do we know what aircraft they do that with?

**[0:18:58] IP:** The Pols used, I believe it was a Beach King Air, and I think Flight Calibration Services uses Beach and some Pilatus Aircraft as well, but we can look that up and stick it in the show notes.

**[0:19:08] CL:** Let's take a look.

**[0:19:09] IP:** We've done some good stuff. Their flight paths are always fun to look at.

**[0:19:11] CL:** Absolutely. I'd say, that's another common tweet, question, isn't it?

**[0:19:17] IP:** Oh absolutely. What's this aircraft doing?

**[0:19:18] CL:** What is this airplane doing?

**[0:19:20] IP:** That was one of the first explanatory blog posts I wrote when I started at FlightRadars a decade ago. A long time ago, before we had as good coverage as we did, it was

where did this aircraft go, why did it disappear, what is this aircraft doing, when it was doing bad transponder stuff before ADS-B had really started to roll out, explaining MLAT and then it was, what are these patterns?

**[0:19:43] CL:** I feel like, a good guide is if it's either going in a constant circle, or if it's going up and down. It's doing some beacon, or approach calibration.

**[0:19:52] IP:** Yeah. Especially if it's a perfect circle.

**[0:19:55] CL:** Yes, absolutely.

**[0:19:56] IP:** It's always fun to see.

**[0:19:58] CL:** Do head to the blog and check that article out.

**[0:20:00] IP:** We'll toss it in the show notes. Yeah. Then, the last thing I wanted to bring up was we talked about the delivery of Emirates first A350 a few weeks ago. We talked a little bit about it last week. Again, we have a strong listenership, apparently, among aviation finance professionals, which is fantastic and a few lawyers. Not only did they offer some helpful explanation by way of what was happening, but even more so, I got homework and that was fantastic. The discussion started with they flew from Toulouse to Dubai via the UK, flying through UK airspace, and we knew that this was a requirement for the financing. I asked the questions, why is it a requirement for the financing and why have we not done away with this?

As is often the case, it all comes down to lawyers and judges and one particular case. In this case, it's a court decision that affected leasing vehicles, a special purpose vehicle that was designed to lease our own Boeing 747-400 and Mahan Air, which was, or is an Iranian airline. The legal machinations are interesting, and I'll put a link to the Law Review article that I read through.

**[0:21:34] CL:** Some bits on reading.

**[0:21:36] IP:** Exactly. The long and the short of it is the aircraft made its way to Mahan Air when it wasn't supposed to. The special purpose vehicle, Blue Sky One, wanted the aircraft back. Because the contract was written in England, they went to English court to argue over this and the judges said, "No, no, no, no. You can't get it back, because there wasn't a security instrument created. You cannot use this particular aircraft. You didn't do it right, so you can't use this particular aircraft as collateral for the mortgage so you're not getting it back."

**[0:22:11] CL:** Right. Okay.

**[0:22:13] IP:** Because no one wants to lose an aircraft, especially one that's hundreds of millions of dollars, euros, pounds, what have you, that's why they continue to fly through the UK.

**[0:22:24] CL:** Quick trip to the northwest, and then –

**[0:22:27] IP:** The explanation is, it basically boils down to, we want to make sure that we have a valid contract so that we can repossess the aircraft if anyone stops making payments, or if somebody seizes it, we have a legal claim to it so that we can get our aircraft back. The amount of money we spend on the jet fuel to fly from wherever, up to the UK –

**[0:22:51] CL:** Is going to be way less.

**[0:22:53] IP:** That's less than – because there are ways to do the contract in a way that you don't have to fly through the UK, but that would cost you more in legal fees. It's the cost of the jet fuel versus the cost of the legal fees and the headache and maybe this will be fine, maybe it won't be fine. They know that if they fly through UK airspace, they sign the paperwork while the aircraft is in UK airspace, they move on.

**[0:23:19] CL:** Right. Well, first of all, I have no questions. I thought that was a perfect explanation. I totally get that. As we have learned from Russia, if you don't like a law, just change it.

**[0:23:30] IP:** Yeah. As it turns out, it's much more difficult to change a law when you have to involve parliament and their competing priorities.

**[0:23:38] CL:** That makes sense. Yeah.

**[0:23:39] IP:** It doesn't seem like this is a high priority for folks in the UK. Yeah, so there are the explanations. That's the episode. We've got a short episode today, lots of traveling, lots of visit. We need to go get ready for Curling.

**[0:23:51] CL:** We do.

**[0:23:52] IP:** Is what we need to do.

**[0:23:53] CL:** I think it involves putting a jacket on, mostly.

**[0:23:55] IP:** And a helmet. And a helmet.

**[0:23:56] CL:** Oh, and a helmet.

**[0:23:57] IP:** Yes. Helmets are required. If neither Chris nor I are doing the podcast next week, and it's Jason sitting here by himself, you know that we did not survive Curling. We'll be back with a new episode next week. Then as we wind down the year, we're both getting closer to episode 300 and getting closer to our annual clip show. We'll have some good stuff around all of that at the end of the year. Until then, this has been episode 297 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, today with –

**[0:24:26] CL:** Chris Lomas. Thanks, Ian.

[END]