

**EPISODE 299**

[EPISODE]

**[0:00:07] IP:** Hello and welcome to episode 299 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

**[0:00:17] JR:** Jason Rabinowitz. Hello, Ian. Is this our last episode of the year?

**[0:00:21] IP:** This is our last new episode of the year.

**[0:00:24] JR:** Fantastic.

**[0:00:25] IP:** That's correct.

**[0:00:26] JR:** What a year. What a year it's been. I hardly remember last week, but I think 2024 overall was pretty fine.

**[0:00:34] IP:** It was pretty fine. Yeah. I think overall, the story of the year was continued supply chain disruption and disappointment of airlines and operators in the ability of maintenance and manufacturers to deliver on their promises. I think that's the overarching theme of this year's episodes, as I've gone back and looked through the episodes to put together next week's show, which is some of our favorite moments from this year.

**[0:01:09] JR:** Excellent. Excellent.

**[0:01:11] IP:** But we couldn't escape the year without –

**[0:01:17] JR:** Falling off an intelligence cliff that seems, I don't know –

**[0:01:21] IP:** Mass hysteria, dogs and cats living together. Okay, let's back up.

**[0:01:28] JR:** Back up a second, and let's try to pinpoint the exact story where we can pinpoint the moment where humankind is, I don't know, become unrecoverably stupid to a point?

**[0:01:41] IP:** No, no, no, no.

**[0:01:42] JR:** I think there might not be any coming back from this. This is where the plot of idiocracy takes over.

**[0:01:47] IP:** There's coming back from this, because there will just be the next thing.

**[0:01:51] JR:** Okay. We're not done with this thing yet, though.

**[0:01:54] IP:** Yeah. Unfortunately, we're not done with this thing yet. That's true. Okay, so here's as best I can understand it, what has happened so far. We're of course referring to the drones. More specifically, the mass hysteria that has gripped much of New Jersey with regard to what many, many people are claiming are drones. Drones is any aircraft, apparently, that you cannot identify because you're not on, or something. It's unclear to me how they're these distinctions are being made. But here's what's happened as far as I understand it so far. In mid-November, there were reports and what seemed to be legitimate reports of unknown small drones over the Picatinny Arsenal in New Jersey.

Those reports are being investigated by the military, which certainly takes seriously the incursion over its facilities. It's being investigated by a variety of three-letter agencies in the US. Now, it's apparently being investigated by every single person who has decided to look up into the sky. That seems to be where this all started, as far as an actual thing to kick off a conspiracy theory. From there, everyone, it seems, on the East Coast and especially in New Jersey, looked up for the first time at night and saw lights in the sky. Instead of thinking, oh, I live next to Newark International Airport, one of the busiest international airports on the Eastern Seaboard. Maybe those are airplanes. People have decided that those are drones.

This is expanded to be anything that happens mostly at night. These things only flight night apparently, and they all have navigation lights. so people have taken to claiming that these are drones, these are unidentified aircraft. Certainly, they are unidentified, if you personally are

unable to identify them. for the most part, they are easily identifiable as human manufactured and operated aircraft. Lots of the videos that I've seen have made these aircraft easily identifiable, not even pulling out flightradar24, just looking at the airplane and going, that looks like an American Airlines 737. That looks like a French BA350.

When you add the ability to track aircraft via flightradar24 into the mix, it becomes even easier to see that people are discovering that they apparently live under approach and departure paths from major international airports.

**[0:04:56] JR:** Not just major international airports. There is also in Central Jersey, if that is actually a thing, Maguire Air Force Base, a pretty large Air Force Base, and not all of those aircraft rightfully so transmit ADSB, and they are not trackable for obvious reasons. Yeah, there probably are untrackable aircraft flying low over New Jersey, because that happens all the time. That's not anything new. It's just the mass hysteria that has been stoked, not just by people in New Jersey looking up, which is a fun sentence to say, but also, up into the ranks of government, where you have politicians from Pennsylvania, seeing a very clearly fake Star Wars prop on the back of a flatbed truck driving and he's going, oh, that must be one of those drones that got downed. then you have what was the governor of Pennsylvania pointing his phone up to the sky.

**[0:05:54] IP:** I believe, it was Larry Hogan, former governor of Maryland.

**[0:05:57] JR:** Oh, that's right. I'm sorry.

**[0:05:59] IP:** That discovered Orion's belt. My apologies to Josh Shapiro. That didn't sound right, but I got the wrong governor. But the governor of Maryland looking up at the sky saying, "Drones," when it was literally stars in the sky. Proven to be stars in the sky. We have gotten to this point of mass hysteria that I think is the pinpoint moment of peak stupidity of at least the US population, that government officials state top government officials are looking up, panicking at the literal stars in the sky. That's how bad this is.

**[0:06:35] IP:** Speaking of government officials, all of the statements that we've – the official statements that we've got, as in here's a statement from the FBI and from the military, they say,

“We haven't found anything that would indicate that any of this is a systematic operation of unidentified aircraft.” All of these statements point to the fact that all of the reports that they've received so far have been found out to be human powered, human operated aircraft stuffed with humans, hundreds of them as well.

**[0:07:11] IP:** Because here comes the FedEx and UPS pilots banding together to say, “Please, stop shining lasers at us. We are carrying your Christmas presents and do not want to crash into your neighborhood.”

**[0:07:22] JR:** Yes, that would be helpful. To that point, the FAA at the exact moment we started recording this podcast today, actually, put out some laser incident data that year over year from December 2023 over to December 2024, which is not over, it is only December 18<sup>th</sup>, reports specifically of aircraft getting lasered in New Jersey is up 269% over the same year. December 2023 reported 16 incidents for the entire month. So far in December 2024 through December 16<sup>th</sup>, there have been 59 incidents of morons going outside, pointing lasers at aircraft that could range anywhere from nothing bad happens to blinding the pilots operating the flight leading to some incident, which seems like it's only a matter of time at this point.

It is to anyone who says this is just harmless activity, people being stupid, nothing bad is going to happen, something bad will eventually happen if this hysteria keeps up. I mean, there are other government officials saying, “If I see this over my lane, I'm going to shoot it down.” Well, at some point that NOTAM that's in Haiti, that you don't want to fly too low, because people are shooting at airplanes. Well, that's going to become New Jersey. Man, that's going to make it hard for United to operate a hub.

**[0:08:45] IP:** Yeah. I mean, let's widen our scope here and talk a little bit about what people are seeing in the sky and how you can – and this might be a little remedial for our audience. In case you're listening to the podcast for the first time, or you just think to yourself, “Okay, maybe this will be helpful. I can share it with someone who,” if you're the avgeek in your group of friends, I assume that people have been asking you what you think is happening. Let's talk about what people are saying.

Aircraft on approach often are visible, because they have turned their lights on, are more visible because they have turned additional lights on, which is often, I think, what we're seeing with these videos is where aircraft are turning on their landing lights and people go, "Oh, that must be one of the drones." You'll also notice that aircraft are blinking with anti-collision beacons and navigation lights. If it has navigation lights, it's fairly safe to assume that it's an aircraft that does not want to crash into things.

**[0:09:51] JR:** Yes. Drones flying over areas for espionage, or spying reasons probably aren't turning all of their anti-collision and landing lights on and all sorts of other lights. They usually don't have people looking out the windows either.

**[0:10:04] IP:** There's that.

**[0:10:06] JR:** If you're running an espionage drone mission, you're probably not going to turn the lights on.

**[0:10:09] IP:** Exactly. Also, as far as identifying where aircraft are and identifying the specific aircraft, if you're hearing aircraft, you are behind where the aircraft actually is, if you're hearing it, because light travels faster than sound. If you hear where the aircraft is, look in front of that, because that's where you're going to see the aircraft. I think that gets a lot of people in trouble, especially at night, where they're saying, "I hear it, but I can't see anything," because you're probably looking in the wrong spot. Be aware of that.

Two, human depth perception, especially at night, is terrible. It is terrible. People often perceive things, especially aircraft, as closer to them than they actually are. One of the things that folks have done when they're trying to use flightradar24, or whatever, if you're using another service and listening to this podcast, fine, I guess. But zoom out, because the aircraft could be further away, or higher than you think. Those are just some of the tips that I've been giving far too often this week. I really hope that we can be done with this before, like Jason said, before something happens, before something bad happens, before somebody takes this too far.

**[0:11:41] JR:** Yeah. I do have a theory of why this has been so disproportionately reported for New Jersey and to a lesser extent, New York. No, we're not elitist here. We know what airplanes

are, but I do have a feeling that in New York, Air Traffic Control has a tendency to bring aircraft to a lower and slower altitude far sooner before they arrive at the airport than other major metro areas, just because of the traffic conditions here, how congested the airspace is. It may not be something people are used to elsewhere to see a 787 at 3,000 feet nowhere near the actual airport, but that's actually quite common here.

The approach path for all three of our airports, depending on where you're coming from, Newark, LaGuardia, and JFK, all of those routes have a tendency to go over New Jersey pretty close to each other. It's not surprising that there are a lot of aircraft flying low and slow at night when air traffic increases into over New Jersey, because that's just how it works around here.

**[0:12:44] IP:** I thought we were going to try and find a way to blame this on the FAA moving the trade responsibility to Philadelphia.

**[0:12:50] JR:** If New Jersey can blame Philly for something, that's always a good scapegoat. Maybe let's just go with that.

**[0:12:56] IP:** There you go. Hopefully, we're not back with any additional stories on this, but we'll keep you posted. I fear that this might not be the last we hear of the drones. But we're moving on and we're going to Ireland. We are taking two, not one, but two Airbus A321 XLR's home to Dublin today. EI-XLR and EI-XLT both went home with Aer Lingus, making it the second and third A321 XLR deliveries and the first and second for the Irish carrier. They're getting them out the door at Airbus.

**[0:13:35] JR:** Yeah. I love when the airline puts the name of the aircraft right there in the registration, EI-XLR. That's fantastic. I think Aer Lingus is also one of the airlines that, at least on its A330s does a lot of the airports as the airport codes, as the suffix for its aircraft. I think at least, maybe they used to, or do they still do?

**[0:13:56] IP:** That's an interesting question. I don't know.

**[0:13:59] JR:** Let's see. Aer Lingus fleet. I'm going to look this up real quick, because why not?

**[0:14:06] IP:** While Jason's looking that up –

**[0:14:07] JR:** It's the last of the year, and it isn't indeed the case. Or no, actually used to be it. No longer. That's disappointing. But there is still the one A321neo XLR at Iberia, which I assume at some point will have friends that didn't end up at Aer Lingus. That's nice, eventually.

**[0:14:25] IP:** With the A321 XLR as well, the FAA has now certified both engine options for the A321 XLR. The Pratt & Whitney 1100G engine received FAA approval this week as well. That means the CFM Leap 1A and the Pratt & Whitney GTF engine options for the A321 XLR are now good to go. The Pratt & Whitney engines are across 13 customers and 217 A321 XLR orders, including those from JetBlue and United. That means that everything is now certified by the FAA, as far as the A321 XLR is concerned. Beginning in the new year, we could see the first US airline gain their first A321 XLR.

In the Puget Sound region, Boeing has now restarted production on the 767-777 lines as well, after restarting 737 production last week. That means everything is pretty much back in very, very slow action, but it's back in action over at Boeing. That's good to see them getting going before the end of the year.

**[0:15:49] JR:** Yeah. Hopefully, we'll actually see the 777X certified one of these days. I feel like, we haven't heard much news about that in quite a long time, since there's been a lot of other Boeing news. Like, the machinist strike that we're talking about here, or the new Air Force One being delayed until after this upcoming presidential term. I feel like, we're due for a 777X update of some sort for better or worse.

**[0:16:15] IP:** Yeah. Hopefully, soon. I mean, it hasn't flown. We're still waiting for that test for you to get back in the air. Hopefully, they do soon. Maybe in the beginning of the year. Maybe we could talk about that in the first show of the year. Let's go to, well, we can't go to Europe on Air Tanzania, because they've been blacklisted. As soon as Pakistan International Airlines was removed from the European Union's blacklist, they added Air Tanzania. I bring up this story, not because it's really a big issue, because Air Tanzania didn't serve any European destinations. It's not like they're being cut off, or anything like that. But I will say that the European Commission's Sustainable Transport Commissioner's name is Apostolos Tzitzikostas.

**[0:17:06] JR:** Well pronounced, I can only assume.

**[0:17:09] IP:** I think that's a great name.

**[0:17:11] JR:** Fantastic.

**[0:17:12] IP:** I also bring it up, because Air Tanzania operates a state-of-the-art fleet, as far as commercial aircraft are concerned, 787s, 737 MAX and A220s. It's concerning from a fleet maintenance standpoint that the European Commission has identified a variety of safety concerns, large enough to deny them the ability to operate into Europe. On the flip side of that coin, they have offered them assistance in solving some of those problems. Hopefully, they will take advantage of that and then get off the blacklist.

**[0:17:47] JR:** Yeah. They're definitely not alone. I think, 10 other African airlines were added to the list, or already on the list. Airlines do come off the list. We saw that, of course, you mentioned PIA, Pakistan, finally coming off that list who was on since 2020, after that really horrendous crash in Pakistan back in 2020. Airlines do come off that list, but it is never a list you want to find yourself on.

**[0:18:15] IP:** No. No, indeed. Let's come back to the US and talk about some administrative issues here. This story is, I saw the press release from the FAA earlier this week, and I thought, "Huh, I assumed that was already a thing." But the FAA has finalized its drug and alcohol testing for employees at foreign repair stations. These are part 145 repair stations that work on part 121 air carrier aircraft. If United Airlines, for instance, sends its 777s for refurbishment in Hong Kong, those employees at that station would now be subject to drug and alcohol testing, if they weren't already as part of Hong Kong's regulations.

This lays out regulations, unless there are stricter regulations already in place at that locality. The FAA says this will affect 977 Part 145 repair stations in 65 countries, which, wow, that's a lot of repair stations.

**[0:19:28] JR:** Yeah. Even if they're not actively used by any US airlines, but you would probably be surprised if you don't know already how much US airlines rely on foreign bases to do even routine maintenance, whether it's installing Wi-Fi, installing a new business class, or overhauling engines, this is an incredibly common practice. It is probably well past due at this point to have a little more oversight of who exactly is doing the work and in what condition are they doing that work. Because they certainly would be under scrutiny if that work was happening here in the US, so why shouldn't that be the case if it happens in Hong Kong, or Taipei, or wherever? What was it? 69 countries?

**[0:20:14] IP:** 65.

**[0:20:15] JR:** 65 countries. That's a lot of countries.

**[0:20:17] IP:** That's a lot of countries. Elsewhere in the halls of the FAA, we have news that FAA Administrator Whitaker is going to resign, effective just before the new administration takes office. Michael Whitaker said that he will step down on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, the same day that President-elect Donald Trump will be inaugurated. As well as that, Deputy Administrator Katie Thompson is also resigning. It looks like, Mark House who is now the Assistant Administrator will become the acting deputy administrator, which would I think technically make him the acting administrator, though the acting and the deputies is all very confusing to me. The bottom line here is that we'll leave the FAA once again without permanent leadership in a time when permanent leadership seems to be the thing that the FAA needs the most.

**[0:21:16] JR:** Needs the most and seemingly at this rate, we'll never actually have, which is super disappointing, because there's some big ticket items that need the FAA's hands all over, like the 777X and the 787-10, and I'm sorry, the 737-10 and 737-7s. There's a lot that the FAA needs to do, which now becomes that much harder yet again, as I don't want to say, a rudderless organization, but an organization that yet again, doesn't have a full-time administrator. How long has it been since there's been an administrator that has served the full term? It's been over two decades, or something like that.

**[0:21:55] IP:** Michael Huerta was, he was in the position for four years, from 2013 to 2017.

**[0:22:07] JR:** Okay, so a little under a decade.

**[0:22:10] IP:** Yeah, but it's been a while. It's been a long while. I know we talked extensively about how good it was that Whitaker was taking the job and the FAA finally had a full-time permanent leader. We'll see how long it takes to get a new full-time permanent leader. Elsewhere, the Department of Transportation has finalized the new slot assignments for the long-haul routes from DCA. Jason, if you would, be so kind as to tell us where we can now go from Washington DC?

**[0:22:48] JR:** I don't know if I'd call these long-haul routes, but they are certainly busting the perimeter rule that they have in place at DCA. The routes will go to Alaska, to San Diego, American to San Antonio, Delta to Seattle, Southwest to Las Vegas, and United to San Francisco. Not really any surprises here. Fun that Delta is operating to Seattle and Alaska is not operating to Seattle, but they have a little hub in San Diego as well. I believe the airlines have 90 days from the date of announcement to start operating, not start selling, but start operating the route. If you live in the DC metro area and fly to San Diego, San Antonio, Seattle, Las Vegas, or San Francisco, congratulations. You have, I think, 80 days until a new, either a new route opens, or an additional daily flight opens.

**[0:23:39] IP:** Well, that's fun.

**[0:23:40] JR:** Yeah, that is fun. I'd love some of that here in New York, or we still have the absolutely hard and fast rule at LaGuardia, the perimeter rule, except for Sundays, or Saturdays? Saturdays. Anything goes on Saturday. The other six days of the week, we have, I think, a 1,500-mile permit or rule. Would love to have some exemptions, like a flight to Seattle, or a flight to LA, like DCA has.

**[0:24:05] IP:** No.

**[0:24:05] JR:** No. That's a hard no.

**[0:24:08] IP:** This next story comes to us from Mars.

**[0:24:11] JR:** Another planet.

**[0:24:12] IP:** Yeah.

**[0:24:13] JR:** Wow.

**[0:24:13] IP:** This was very cool. This was flagged. You flagged this and multiple listeners also flagged this for us. Lots. Lots of excitement in the first air accident investigation on another planet.

**[0:24:30] JR:** That is pretty amazing. Was there ever one on the moon? Because there were a lot of manned flights, technically to the moon. Did they ever have to do an accident investigation to the moon? Or is this the first non-Earth-based aircraft accident investigation of any sort? I think it might be that.

**[0:24:53] IP:** This is the first aircraft investigation. I mean, the only other thing I could think of would be Apollo 13, but that was a spacecraft, not an aircraft.

**[0:25:01] JR:** Interesting.

**[0:25:02] IP:** NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory put out a pre-report. I guess, it's akin to the NTSB's preliminary report, I guess.

**[0:25:13] JR:** It's interesting. We have to clarify. This is not the NTSB doing an investigation. It is NASA investigating its own aircraft. Unfortunately, Sean Payne will not, at the NTSB, you will not be getting the flight data recorders from the little helicopter on Mars, though that'd be super cool.

**[0:25:32] IP:** I mean, you would have a hard time going to pull them and get them back. The last flight of the Ingenuity Mars helicopter was on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024. This little helicopter that could, and we talked about this when it first took off, because Jason and I were just so fascinated by it.

**[0:25:53] JR:** We were like, “Holy crap, it's second flight.” It was only supposed to do one, or something like that.

**[0:25:58] IP:** It was designed for, yeah, five flights within a month, and then it was supposed to die.

**[0:26:04] JR:** Then it actually went on in typical NASA JPL fashion, 72 flights over the course of almost three years and flew more than 30 times farther than planned, because, of course, it did. If you know anything about their Mars rovers, this shouldn't be any surprise.

**[0:26:22] IP:** They just keep on going. The long and the short of it is that they moved to the helicopter as it flew flight after flight after flight after flight. It ended up near the rim of a crater. The way the helicopter was designed is it has a downward-looking camera that senses the texture of the ground, and that gives it the ability to figure out how high it is off the ground, as well as the incline of the ground, and to land with not crashing, not smashing into the ground.

**[0:26:56] JR:** Land with not crashing. That is well put.

**[0:27:00] IP:** I should slow down and gently set down, rather than crashing into the ground. Because the sand ripple slope on the crater was featureless, basically, it didn't have enough rocks in the image to figure out exactly which way it was supposed to land, the rapid attitude changes, and I'm quoting the JPL report now, or pretty report, “Resulted in loads on the fast-rotating rotor blades beyond their design limits, snapping all four of them off at their weakest point, about a third of the way from the tip.” It will never fly again, but it still works.

**[0:27:39] JR:** Of course, it does. Just because it doesn't fly, doesn't mean it can't be helpful.

**[0:27:44] IP:** I love it. It's basically a weather station now.

**[0:27:47] JR:** Exactly. It still, in NASA's words, beams, weather, and avionics test data to the perseverance rover about once a week. It basically chimes in and says, “Hey, it's cloudy.” I don't know. But that's really cool. It's not dead. What's most interesting is, I think, the investigative

process of how they determined what the damage was, because in their words, there is no black box on this thing. Did you know, there's no one on Mars to rely on as an eyewitness?

**[0:28:17] IP:** They said that, no, because Mark Watney got home.

**[0:28:19] JR:** That's true. He's not there. What they did was they actually used the very black and white navigation camera that unfortunately, led to the demise of the aircraft, while it's on the ground to look at the shadows of the propeller blades to confirm the damage on those blades. There's a video. You can actually see the blades spin up a little bit and see the damage on the tip. The very camera that couldn't figure out where it was that led to the non-flightworthy status of the aircraft was what they used to determine what actually happened, which I thought was pretty cool.

**[0:28:55] IP:** Yeah. I mean, NASA engineers are nothing if not ingenuity. This was really cool. We'll put a link to the show notes, link in the show notes to this, and we will eagerly await the actual technical report, because I'm very excited to geek out on that.

**[0:29:12] JR:** Sorry if you're the NTSB and you wanted your first crack at an interplanetary –

**[0:29:17] IP:** One day.

**[0:29:18] JR:** - air accident investigation. You won't be getting that this time.

**[0:29:21] IP:** One day. From helicopters flying to pigs flying, we go. This was a story that it's worth mentioning, but it's not the first time and it won't be the last that this happens. KLM flight 685 from Amsterdam to Mexico City diverted to Bermuda last week, when the pigs onboard made the aircraft smell so bad that everybody needed to crack open a window.

**[0:29:52] JR:** Well, you can't do that.

**[0:29:54] IP:** No. But what you can do is divert and let the passengers and pigs off. The aircraft was traveling with about 100 pigs in the cargo hold. By the time they were over Bermuda, they

just smelled so bad that they decided to divert to Bermuda and then continue on the next day, after some crew and pig rest.

**[0:30:19] JR:** I feel like, we've been dealing with an abnormally high number of animals onboard aircraft revolting stories recently. I like this trend.

**[0:30:29] IP:** Just wait until they start trying to fly the plane. Then all bets are off. Let's run through a bit of update news to close out the year, and then Jason is going to quiz me on some of the top routes from 2024. I have purposely not looked at the data, just so that we can have a guess.

**[0:30:52] JR:** Fun.

**[0:30:53] IP:** Air Canada is doing a couple interesting things, one of which they're bringing free Wi-Fi to everyone in the coming years. That'll be nice.

**[0:31:01] JR:** Cool. Join the club. Welcome.

**[0:31:04] IP:** Yeah. Becomes the latest airline to do that. More interesting, as far as I'm concerned, is that they're swapping all of the 737 MAX aircraft to Rouge and they are swapping all of their Airbus aircraft over to Air Canada Prime. This is a consequence of the new Air Canada pilots contract that certain aircraft can only be operated by certain pilots. As a way of solving that issue, they're just moving all of the aircraft over, so that they can fulfill that contract. It sounds like, that's supposed to be done in the next couple of years. It's not going to happen tomorrow.

**[0:31:41] JR:** Yeah. I think the plan is through 2028. All the MAXs will end up at Rouge. All of the Rouge aircraft that are operating today, they are elderly, to say the least. I think Air Canada put it gently as approaching end of life aircraft.

**[0:31:56] IP:** Approaching end of life.

**[0:31:58] JR:** They're not wrong. I think some of those 321s are in their mid to upper 20s. When all is said and done, according to what they put out in their investor briefing yesterday, which would have been Tuesday, Air Canada mainline domestic operations at least, or narrowbody will solely be the A220 and A321, whatever variants of the A321 they have, be it that the COs they have, or the A321 XLR that they're expecting to take delivery of, but that'll be it. Because right now, Air Canada's narrowbody fleet is a hot mess all over the place with ancient 320s. There are some 319s in the mix. There's some Rouge aircraft operating for Air Canada, some Air Canada aircraft operating for Rouge.

They've taken a bunch of 321s from, I think, EVA Air, and some maybe from Wow Air. I'm not quite sure, but they've taken them from all over the place, kind of out of desperation, since Boeing and Airbus are very obviously, delayed in getting them aircraft, so that they take whatever they can get. By 2028, it'll look maybe normal.

**[0:33:04] IP:** By 2030.

**[0:33:05] JR:** Sure. Add another couple of years, because we're dealing with a subsidiary, too. Add another extra two years. At least, they have a plan to be a normal airline and make a lot more money in the future.

**[0:33:17] IP:** Don't we all? Sticking with Canada and speaking of needing every aircraft they can get, this story was flagged by our good friend and listener, the Canadian Plane Person. WestJet after planning to scrap three aircraft is now only scrapping two based on the August 5<sup>th</sup> hailstorm in Calgary. One of their 737-700s was deemed necessary enough to fix and get back in the air. CGWCN is back in service as of today. They really needed that plane and it's back in service. Good for them for getting the hail damage shot all ironed out.

**[0:34:00] JR:** Well, it was only grounded for four months from being considered written off to back in service. That's not all that long, considering there were so many other aircraft that needed maintenance and rehab, too. That's not all that bad.

**[0:34:16] IP:** No. No. Not bad at all. Jason, you flagged this one and this doesn't seem that out of character for Delta.

**[0:34:25] JR:** No. Much like what we talked about with Air Canada, Delta has a lot of old aircraft, but that's no surprise. We've talked about that many, many times, specifically the 757s, which is the fleet that cannot, will not die, or be killed, or be retired. It's to the point now where Delta has begun refurbishing its 757s beginning with the 28-year-old N706TW. If the TW at the end of that registration rings a bell, yes, indeed, this aircraft is so old, it started its life with TWA and eventually, found its way to Delta. It is not being refurbished by choice, I don't think. It is being refurbished as I put it, an indictment of current aircraft manufacturers, but also, a testament to the 757's ability to live forever and the ability of Delta to make an aircraft live forever.

I don't think Delta wants to do it. I'm sure it would much rather do this with A321neos that it's supposed to have delivered and 737s that it's supposed to have delivered, but are not. 28-year-old aircraft being refurbished to that, a completely new interior, means that it's going to fly well, well into its 30s, which I don't know. I guess, that's good. As long as Delta can keep the parts in stock, keep the aircraft reliable, it seems like, the 75s might live on forever.

**[0:35:54] IP:** I mean, Delta's oldest 757-200 is literally flying to the desert today.

**[0:36:05] JR:** Oh, no.

**[0:36:07] IP:** Oh, no. I just clicked on the oldest one and it's –

**[0:36:09] JR:** Somebody stop it.

**[0:36:10] IP:** It's in the air on the way. Oh, no, I take that back. It's still very much active. It's flying to the desert, because it's one of their charter aircraft.

**[0:36:19] JR:** Oh, one of the NDA charter aircraft. Yeah.

**[0:36:22] IP:** But it's 35-years-old.

**[0:36:24] JR:** Yeah. 28, I guess, ain't that old in the world of Delta 757s.

**[0:36:31] IP:** Their youngest 757 is 20-years-old.

**[0:36:34] JR:** Yeah. I think that was one of the Shanghai Airlines aircraft that they took a couple years ago.

**[0:36:39] IP:** It's got one of the DX Red, so yeah, it's entirely possible.

**[0:36:44] JR:** Yeah, some of the last ever, ever built. Yeah, 28-years-old and being refurbished. That's crazy.

**[0:36:52] IP:** It's literally the last 757 ever built.

**[0:36:54] JR:** Is it?

**[0:36:55] IP:** N823DX is yes, former Shanghai Airlines. It's the last 757 ever built. Line number 1050. There you go, a little bit of trivia. Unexpected trivia for the podcast today. Aircalin was undisclosed airline number two. The pair of A350s that went to an undisclosed order book previously this quarter is now revealed to be Aircalin. Luxair has ordered two more E195-E2s, which is worthy of note, considering the E195-E2 doesn't get a ton of love. Also, there's a decent chance we could get a very nice special livery on one of those Luxair E195-E2s, which I am always looking forward to.

**[0:37:45] JR:** Fantastic.

**[0:37:46] IP:** All right, Jason, you have this flagged as top domestic/international routes of 2024. Let me guess.

**[0:37:53] JR:** Okay, you're not going to have too many goes at this, because the number one, at least domestic route, it never changes. No one knows why. I've flown this route with friend of the podcast, Seth Miller, and we couldn't figure out why it's so popular either. Number one, the busiest by a wide margin route for a domestic flight. What do you got?

**[0:38:16] IP:** Okay, this is going to be Seoul-Jeju.

**[0:38:19] JR:** That's correct. Seoul-Gimpo. Not Incheon. It's the other airport. 14,183,719 seats offered in 2024 says, OAG in their annual ranking of routes by offered seats. It's not even close. The next event, the next highest number is Sapporo to Tokyo, Haneda in Japan at almost a little shy of 12 million. That's a gap of 2 million seats per year. Just really quite shocking that the Jeju-Seoul route is just still, even after the changes throughout COVID, retains its number one domestic title. It's not even close. Interestingly, all of the top 10 are all in the Asia-Pacific Middle East Oceanic region. Nothing in Europe, North or South America, is in the top 10. Not even close.

**[0:39:15] IP:** I mean, that makes sense to me. That makes sense to me. I would maybe expect one US route to be in the top 10, but it makes sense to me, given how perfectly suited for high-frequency domestic travel some of those places are. That makes sense to me. I mean, because the ones I'm thinking of would be all of the domestic triangle route in Australia. You've got Melbourne-Sydney, Brisbane-Sydney.

**[0:39:43] JR:** Melbourne-Sydney is number five at 9.2 million.

**[0:39:46] IP:** A couple of Tokyo routes, I would assume would be heavily trafficked, where you've got domestic –

**[0:39:52] JR:** Three of them, in fact, the two, three and seven are owned by Haneda.

**[0:39:56] IP:** Yeah, you've got domestic 777s with 900 people on them.

**[0:40:00] JR:** That's true.

**[0:40:01] IP:** I would assume, a couple Chinese cities, like Beijing-Shanghai, maybe? Beijing-Guangzhou.

**[0:40:07] JR:** Guangzhou to Shanghai is number 10.

**[0:40:09] IP:** Okay. All right. There you go. Yeah. That all makes sense to me. Yeah.

**[0:40:13] JR:** Yeah. Look at that. Let's shift to international. What do you think is the number one traffic international route, according to OAG? The numbers are far, far lower than domestic. It's not one I would have guessed.

**[0:40:28] IP:** Huh. Okay. Is it maybe Seoul-Tokyo?

**[0:40:33] JR:** No. Neither country is in the number one.

**[0:40:36] IP:** Okay.

**[0:40:37] JR:** You're in the right region. Asia is the correct region.

**[0:40:40] IP:** Okay.

**[0:40:41] JR:** I'll give you a hint.

**[0:40:41] IP:** Okay.

**[0:40:42] JR:** Hong Kong is one of the ends of this route.

**[0:40:46] IP:** Hong Kong-Singapore?

**[0:40:49] JR:** No. Hong Kong-Taipei is the number one busiest international route in the world for 2024 with 6.78 million seats offered. That's a lot of seats between Hong Kong and Taipei. Number seven is Bangkok-Hong Kong as well. Number two clocks in Cairo to Jeddah, which is interesting. Then finally, we get some representation in the Americas. The only entry for the Americas is the amazingly profitable, number one profitable route in the world, I still believe, JFK to London Heathrow at 4 million seats.

**[0:41:30] IP:** Wow.

**[0:41:30] JR:** The spread actually isn't huge here. Number one, 6.7 million to number 10, 4 million. It's a big difference from the domestic routes, which are in the teens of millions. Hey, JFK getting in the top 10, I'll take it.

**[0:41:44] IP:** All right then. Very cool. Well, this ends the last new episode of 2024 for us. We'll be back next week with our year-end clip show to recap some of our favorite moments from the year. Then we'll be off next week, or the week after on the first week of January and we'll be back with our first new episode of the year on the 10<sup>th</sup>. We're gearing up to begin the year in a good way. I don't think it'll be the first episode back, but one of the first couple episodes back, we're going to have a super special guest on. As soon as we figure out exactly when that episode will be, we'll be able to share a bit more details. I'm very, very excited.

**[0:42:30] JR:** Going to be a good one.

**[0:42:31] IP:** To speak with this person. If Jason's excited, you know it's going to be good.

**[0:42:35] JR:** I even set it up myself.

**[0:42:37] IP:** Well, you've brought it upon us.

**[0:42:40] JR:** I brought the party to the table and then handed it off to the people who deal with the scheduling, which is you.

**[0:42:47] IP:** Yeah, the people. In any case, we're very much looking forward to that, and we are ever so grateful for all of you who listen week in and week out. We appreciate you very, very much. If you like the show, if you want to tell us more about what you like about the show, leave us a rating or review wherever you get your podcast. Apple Podcast is our number one venue for listening. Spotify made a very strong showing this year. We were ever so grateful to be number one among the things people listen to on Spotify for a great many of the people who are following the show. It seems that a lot of people follow us and just us on Spotify. I'm really happy about that.

**[0:43:35] JR:** Cool.

**[0:43:36] IP:** Or you just listen to the podcast over and over and over again, which is great, too. Thank you so very much from myself and from Jason. We truly appreciate it. This has been episode 299 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

**[0:43:54] JR:** Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]