

Seventh heaven

50 years ago, Boeing and Pan Am revolutionized travel with the 707

By MICHAEL LOMBARDI

This year marks the 50th anniversary of successful scheduled jet travel—made possible with Boeing commercial jets, starting with the pioneering 707.

Boeing, its employees and stakeholders are celebrating this auspicious anniversary with the introduction of the latest member of the “7” family—the revolutionary 787 Dreamliner. The advances in passenger experience that the 787 will introduce are reminiscent of the advances first experienced 50 years ago when Pan American World Airways blazed a trail across the Atlantic Ocean with its brand-new Boeing 707.

On Aug. 15, 1958, Pan Am took delivery of the United States’ first commercial jet airliner, a Boeing 707-120, and began plans for Oct. 26, 1958, when Pan Am and the 707 would make history by inaugurating the first 707 service and the first daily transatlantic jet service from New York to Paris.

Great Britain had been first with jet service in May 1952, flying the DeHavilland Comet I between London and Johannesburg, South Africa. Unfortunately a series of accidents grounded the Comet.

Determined to maintain the lead for Britain and in order to stay ahead of Pan Am and Boeing, British Overseas Airways Corporation inaugurated its own weekly transatlantic service on Oct. 4, 1958, with the new Comet 4.

It was able to perform two Atlantic crossings before Pan Am began service.

Pan American World Airways put the Boeing 707 into transoceanic scheduled revenue service 50 years ago. That start ushered in the age of jet travel.

BOEING ARCHIVES IMAGE



Another airline to introduce jet service, and the first to offer regularly scheduled and sustained passenger jet service, was the Soviet Union's Aeroflot. In September 1956, the carrier started flying from Moscow to Irkutsk with its Tupolev Tu-104 aircraft.

Although they were first, neither Aeroflot nor BOAC captured the public imagination and success of Pan Am and the Boeing 707.

The world had been anticipating the moment when the first 707 would begin scheduled service and open a new era of travel. Boeing had helped build the anticipation with an ad campaign that highlighted the comfort, speed and safety of jet travel. Indeed, one ad proclaimed: "Only seven hours to brush up on your French."

When the day of the first 707 service arrived, there was a great deal of public excitement and media attention. There was also consternation from Pan Am competitors that operated fleets of propeller-powered airliners. These carriers thought they could hold off the jet age by requiring higher fares for passengers who flew jets, but Pan Am kept the fare for the 707 at the same level it was charging for its piston powered planes: \$505 for first class and \$272 for economy.

Among the 12 crew and 111 passengers lucky enough to get tickets for the inaugural flight were Steve Eastman, a Boeing employee, and his wife Hazel. "My father was well aware of the historical significance of the flight, and made reservations two years in advance to be on it," said Louisa Eastman, their daughter and a Boeing employee today. The Eastmans would also fly on Pan Am's inaugural 747 service and even had reservations for the SST inaugural flight before that program was cancelled.

Steve Eastman wrote an article for the former *Boeing News* newspaper describing his experience. First was a ceremony at New York's Idlewild Airport (now John F. Kennedy International Airport) that featured a gala at the Golden Door restaurant. After Juan Trippe, then Pan Am's president, addressed the gathering, passengers were escorted to the plane by Pan Am flight attendants.

The 707, known as "Clipper America," was bathed in flood lights. The passengers crossed the ramp following a path flanked by the U.S. Army's 42nd (Rainbow) Infantry Division band and marked with flags from countries around the world. Actress Greer Garson, also a passenger on the flight, performed the ribbon cutting, and at 7:20 p.m., the sleek 707 climbed into the night sky.



Only seven hours to brush up on your French

Within weeks you'll be able to cross the Atlantic—and soon the United States—in the luxurious Boeing 707 jetliner.

You'll be delighted with the feeling of solid security you get from flight aboard this swift new skyliner. It begins the moment of take-off, as abundant, jet-smooth power lifts the 707 effortlessly to cruising altitude. You'll fly serenely through high, weatherless skies.

In just 60 minutes, you're almost 600 miles out of New York. In scarcely six hours you'll be trotting out your best French for the dinner at Paris.

The spacious cabin is peaceful and quiet, and completely free from vibration. There is only luxurious comfort, and a sense of exhilaration from the most magical ease and smoothness of 707 flight.

Even if you're a veteran airline traveler you'll find flight in the 707 truly exciting—and secure. The 707 is the most thoroughly flight-tested aircraft ever to enter commercial service.

These airlines have ordered 707's or chartering: AIR FRANCE • AIR INDIA INTERNATIONAL • AIRLINES BRITISH INTERNATIONAL AIRWAYS • BRITISH BRITISH OVERSEAS AIRWAYS • GOVERNMENT AIRWAYS CORPORATION • GOVERNMENT AIRWAYS DE AUSTRALIA • LEPRIER AIRLINES PAN AMERICAN WORLD AIRWAYS • SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS • UNITED AIRLINES • TRANS WORLD AIRLINES • UNITED AIRLINES OF BRAZIL • Also the MILITARY AIR TRANSPORT SERVICE.

BOEING 707 and 720

Boeing helped build anticipation of the era of jet travel with an advertising campaign that focused on the comfort, speed and safety of jet flight. BOEING ARCHIVES IMAGE

In his *Boeing News* account, Eastman described the passengers' excited conversations concerning the lack of noise and vibration. He noted that in a piston-powered airliner, many experienced travelers "normally would have been settled down with ear plugs, blankets and pillows to endure the 12 or more hours of punishment from noise, vibration and buffeting in rough air at lower altitudes."

Knowing from the passenger list that Eastman was a Boeing employee, many of the passengers sought him out. "Their remarks invariably were prefaced by the statement, 'You tell those people at Boeing ...' followed by glowing and in many cases downright emotional comments of the very highest complimentary value," he wrote.

After an unscheduled 71-minute stop in Gander, Newfoundland, due to headwinds, the flight landed at Paris' Le Bourget Airport at 10:01 am, 8 hours and 41 minutes after leaving New York.

Eastman described the crowds in Paris marveling at the airplane and summed up

that "every Boeing employee would and should be extremely proud of the airplane. ... Certainly everyone with whom we have come in contact, whether on board, in service crews, among the many Pan Am people whom we have met, or among the public, is proud to have any connection with the 707."

Although Pan Am and the 707 was not the first airline-jetliner combination, it was the most successful in this era. Two highly respected companies—Boeing and Pan Am, with their reputations and strong brands—helped build confidence and excitement for the future of commercial jet travel.

After the inaugural flight, Pan American began a period of almost unrivaled success in international air travel. For Boeing, it was the beginning of a highly successful business in designing and building the world's finest commercial jet. That story continues, 50 years later, as public anticipation and excitement grow for another new era in air travel that's about to begin with the 787. ■

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