

Beyond the fear of flying

A look at safety in the air

This table presents for the first time information on air safety that the world's air authorities have always tried to suppress. It is the first comparison of all the fatal crashes on scheduled flights between 1950 and 1974.

The table is based on research presented in the book, *Destination Disaster*, by the Sunday Times's Insight team. It contradicts the myth that passenger safety is much the same on one airline as on any other. In fact, safety performance over the past 25 years by different airlines has varied to an enormous extent.

London Sunday Times

Flying is over-all, very safe. In America 99.9999 per cent of air travellers arrive at their destinations safely; in the rest of the world the figure is still well over 99.999 per cent. Flying is incomparably safer than driving or cycling — though it must be said, riskier than other forms of public transport.

Despite this, very large numbers of airline customers, and potential customers, are more or less afraid of flying. This is an area of imperfect research and reliable statistics are hard to come by, but in 1968 the Behavioral Science Corporation of Los Angeles carried out a survey into the fear of flying on behalf of U.S. airlines, and estimated that 18 million Americans suffered from the phobia.

Better than world average

Airline	Nationality	Passengers flown (millions)	Passengers killed	Fatal crashes	"Expected" crashes based on world av.	Fatal crash record comp with world av.
Delta	USA	194	99	2	18	9x better
Qantas*	Australia	10	6	1	6	6x better
JAL	Japan	66	125	2	10	5x better
American	USA	288	288	9	35	4x better
British Caledonian	UK	21	101	1	4	4x better
Continental*	USA	57	42	2	7	3x better
United	USA	347	574	15	45	3x better
Eastern	USA	324	389	9	29	3x better
Lufthansa	W. Germany	67	126	3	8	3x better
TWA	USA	203	623	15	35	2x better
Pan Am	USA	139	557	14	31	2x better
SAS	Sweden	69	54	3	7	2x better
Air Canada	Canada	110	305	8	14	2x better
Swissair	Switzerland	52	115	3	5	2x better

Airlines close to world average

National	USA	72	139	6	8	
Braniff	USA	87	185	6	8	
Alitalia	Italy	60	293	7	8	
KLM*	Holland	38	274	7	8	
British Airways	UK	155	691	21	21	
Northwest*	USA	90	357	13	12	
All Nippon	Japan	79	358	5	5	
SAA	South Africa	19	158	4	3	

Dilemma

The airlines have a dilemma. If no amount of education will cure the phobia, what is the point of even talking publicly about safety? Yet it is manifestly in an airline's interest to persuade those potential customers who are scared that in its planes they have a better chance of travelling intact.

By and large, the compromise that the airlines as individual entities have struck is to pretend in all of their promotion that none of the customers has even considered the possibility of the plane crashing.

The understanding that airlines should not compete for passengers by boasting of a better safety record than their rivals is an unwritten one, but it has rarely, if ever, been breached. Instead, traditionally seats have been filled and revenue won and lost for more ephemeral reasons — the convenience of schedules, the flavor of the cuisine, the quantities of the booze, the star of the inflight movies, illusions of sexual gratification.

Myth

All of this is, of course, harmless enough. So long as we select the airlines we fly with on the basis of convenience or some inflight triviality we can hardly expect those airlines to devote their promotion to discussions of safety, especially since to do so would scare as many as it would attract.

As the Insight investigation makes clear there are very safe airlines and not so safe airlines. The airlines are aware of the disparities, and so, too, are aviation experts and insurers. But the International Air Transport Association (IATA) only concerns itself, at least publicly, with the safety record of its members as a whole.

IATA is perfectly content to compare the performance of scheduled airlines, which make up its membership, with the safety record of charter airlines. But it will not acknowledge that there is any validity in comparing the records of, say, British Airways and British Caledonian, both IATA members.

When we began conducting our survey IATA advised its members not to co-operate in what it feared could only be a "negative" exercise.

As things stand, those air travelers not blessed with inside knowledge have little choice but to select the airlines they fly with for reasons

Worse than world average

Air France	France	91	329	19	1	19x worse
Iberia	Spain	66	317	9	6	1 1/2x worse
CP Air	Canada	17	168	6	4	1 1/2x worse
Varig	Brazil	24	294	5	3	1 1/2x worse
Allegheny	USA	67	152	5	3	1 1/2x worse
Sabena	Belgium	23	193	7	4	2x worse
Mexicana	Mexico	27	124	5	2	3x worse
PIA	Pakistan	13	218	7	2	4x worse
Aer Arg	Argentina	17	282	12	2	5x worse
LOT	Poland	12	95	4	1	6x worse
Garuda	Indonesia	13	130	7	1	6x worse
Avianca	Colombia	35	310	16	2	8x worse
Cubana	Cuba	11	104	6	1	9x worse
JAT	Yugoslavia	14	92	7	1	9x worse
CSA	Czechoslovakia	19	212	10	1	9x worse
IAC	India	29	322	19	2	9x worse
Cruzeiro	Brazil	15	146	11	1	10x worse
THY	Turkey	16	473	10	1	11x worse
PAL	Philippines	24	254	17	2	11x worse
Egyptair	Egypt	7	328	13	1	13x worse
Aviaco	Spain	11	166	7	0	17x worse
Tarom	Romania	7	173	8	0	20x worse

*No crash since January, 1966.

that are often every bit as irrational as the fear of flying. Ironically, it is the fear of flying phobia that, to a large extent, inhibits those airlines with worthy records from initiating the kind of debate about safety that bury, once and for all, the myth of universal excellence.

Yet whatever one does with the figures, certain striking results are obtained:

Most United States airlines have established safety records significantly and consistently — better than the world average. Over-all, American flights have been four to five times less likely to end in fatal crashes than those of the rest of the world.

Western European airlines, taken together, have a record of fatal crashes 2 1/2 times worse than United States airlines. British Airways — combining the records of British Airways and British Caledonian — had exactly the same

es over the 25-year period that would have been "expected" from an average Western European airline. It has done better than, for example, Sabena or Iberia, but less well than Lufthansa or SAS.

Even before its DC-10 crash in 1974, Turkish Airlines had established the unenviable record of being one of the world's airlines most prone to fatal accidents, along with PAL, Egyptair, Aviaco and Tarom. As a group, the countries whose airlines have the worst record are the Communist satellite states of Eastern Europe.

They have had 10 times more fatal crashes than the world average and 25 times more than the United States average. Aeroflot of the Soviet Union almost certainly has a worse record than its