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Ethiopian Airlines builds success on A350 "Preighter"

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The East African airline has continued to fly and create new business since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the A350-900 is part of this success. Read on...



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ome 60 percent of the world’s fleet was grounded in 2020 due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on air transport, as aviation industry estimates show. The impact of the pandemic took a noticeable effect from March 2020 when the number of flights dropped significantly, as a direct consequence of the collapse in passenger demand.

Most companies booked massive financial losses, making 2020 the worst year in the aviation industry financially speaking. Interestingly, Ethiopian Airlines was among those which remained “cash positive” during this period.

Cargo boost to operations

March 2020 is precisely the month when Ethiopian started to operate its first cargo-only service on a passenger aircraft. The Addis Ababa-based carrier made the crucial decision to temporarily convert part of its fleet to carry cargo rather than passengers. Since then, the company has boosted its capacity on cargo operations.

This remarkable agility at all levels of the company enabled Ethiopian to meet the cargo demand which was increasing at that time. Its “freighters” – passenger aircraft carrying cargo in the cabin - transported tonnes of masks and medical products, as well as industrial products and goods such as mobile phones, IT equipment, and clothing.

In a recent communication, the company indicated it had “operated 5,645 cargo flights on the cabin of passenger aircraft and transported more than 121,750 tonnes of cargo across its vast global network. The flights added an immense value to the total of 33,182 flights and 735,869 tonnes of cargo transported during the period from March 25, 2020 to March 25,2021”.

All Ethiopian A350-900 kept flying



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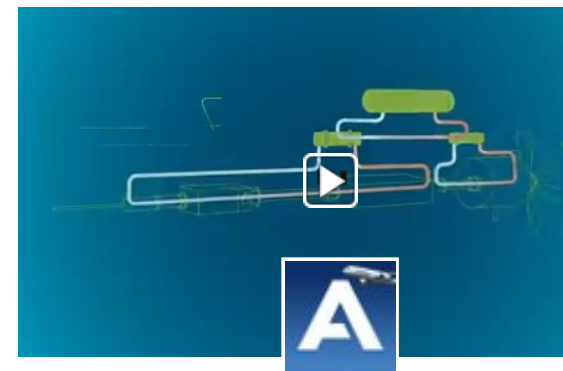
Not surprisingly, Ethiopian used its entire A350-900 fleet for cargo operations. Seven out of its 16 extra-wide body aircraft have been converted to freighters by removing all economy seats. The other nine are used either for passengers or for cargo loaded on the economy seats. As a result, all Ethiopian A350-900 have kept flying during the period.

The East African carrier has fully benefited from the extraordinary capability of the Airbus aircraft to fly with an operational reliability of 99.5 percent. Incorporating advances in flight controls, systems, and wing design, the A350-900 is a truly state-of-the-art aircraft. These developments have a genuine impact in terms of operations, maintenance and efficiency, meaning that the aircraft reduces its fuel burn significantly – generating savings and reducing its environmental impact. The aircraft has the lowest cost per seat of its category.

A350 navigates the storm

Reaching high in terms of efficiency and reliability, the A350 also turns out to be highly versatile. “The cabin layout of the A350 is based on the concept of “simplicity by design” where efficiency of space on board the aircraft is a key factor”, says Mikail Houari, President Airbus Africa Middle East. “The 221-inch cross-section, the straight sidewalls from floor to ceiling, the unequaled height of the ceiling and the reduced tapering offer an unequaled space to load parcels. Designed at the origin to improve the comfort of the passengers, the fully flat, horizontal floor and the recessed rails are particularly practical when the aircraft is in cargo configuration”.

For all these reasons, the A350-900 has been instrumental in the airline’s strategy to navigate the storm. “Let me express my admiration for Ethiopian Airlines’ remarkable achievement during this unprecedented pandemic. Let me also voice my pride to see the A350 playing a critical role in this success”, concludes Mikail.



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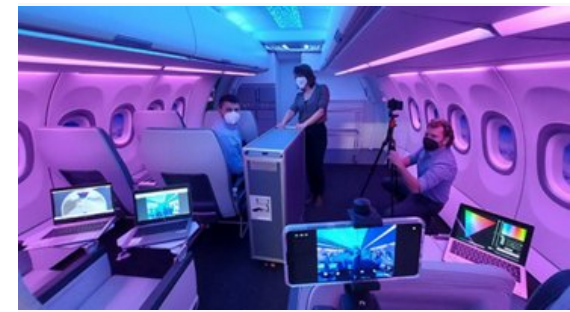
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