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58



30



64



90

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 Linking to the USA the Alaskan way.



Cover Photo:
 Alaska Airlines'
 'Seven Salmon Seven'
 (Alex Carson)

COMPETITION
 2008

Alaska Airlines

On August 28, 2008 Alaska Airlines became an all-Boeing Next-Generation B737 fleet operator with the last flight of one of its McDonnell Douglas MD-80s. The move is part of a two-year plan to increase the airline's operational efficiency and improve fuel conservation. "With the last of our MD-80s retiring and scheduled deliveries of additional new B737-800s this year, we now operate one of the youngest, most fuel-efficient and technologically-advanced fleets in the industry," said Bill Ayer, Alaska's Chairman and CEO. "Our all-Boeing fleet will make a major difference in customer comfort, fleet reliability and operating costs, at a time when

it matters most." As its last MD-80 circled Washington state's Mount Rainer in a symbolic final flight, it was joined by a newly-delivered and specially-painted Alaska Airlines B737-800, dubbed the 'Spirit of Seattle' in tribute to the airline's hometown partnership with the manufacturer.

History

Moving passenger and cargo throughout North America is nothing new to the carrier. In 1932, its founder Linious 'Mac' McGee formed

McGee Airways with its sole three-seat Stinson and provided flights between Anchorage and Bristol Bay in the state of Alaska. It soon merged with Star Air Service, which by 1936 was carrying 35% of all the freight in the State. Linious McGee then sold the airline to a group of investors, led by one of the carrier's former pilots and including a wealthy and powerful mining family, the Strandbergs. They had made their money in the mineral-rich region of Kuskokwim, Alaska and subtly changed the carrier's name to Star Air Lines. In 1942 and after a further sale, it again changed name to Alaska Star



www.alaskaair.com

McGee Airways started in 1932 with this float-equipped Stinson. (All Alaska Airlines unless stated)



nes

Linking the State to the rest of the USA has not always been easy for the Alaskan carrier, as Paolo Giannico explains.

Airlines, and in 1944 became Alaska Airlines. At the end of World War Two the carrier became involved in many different sectors, including worldwide charter work. At the time, it was operating surplus military Curtiss C-46s, Douglas C-47s and C-54s, which had replaced the Lockheed Electras and all came to the aid of the US military with the Berlin Airlift in Germany. This started in June 1948 and lasted until September 1949. Also in 1948 it transported human 'cargo'. During 'Operation Magic Carpet', thousands of Yemenite Jews were flown to the newly formed state of Israel. These crews operated under very hazardous conditions; the 3,000 mile (4,830km) flights started in Eritrea, picking up the passengers

and required a refuelling stop in Aden, lasted some 16 to 20 hours, ending with a night stop in Cyprus – it was too dangerous to leave the aircraft on the ground in Israel. There were threats of being shot down while over Arab territory en route and if that wasn't enough, if they survived the crash, the crew could face execution along with any surviving refugees. Fortunately, there were no casualties during the year-long operation.

During the 1950s, Alaska reinforced its market by buying two other small carriers, and in 1951, after many years of trying, received approval from the US Civil Aviation Board (CAB) to link Anchorage and Fairbanks in Alaska ▶





with Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon. The carrier began to improve its financial footing thanks to the new routes awarded, and in 1957, Charlie Willis became the new CEO. On the major routes, DC-6Cs replaced the unpressurised C-54s, now configured as DC-4s, and the new aircraft were equipped with in-flight entertainment including films – the first carrier to have such a service within the USA. Alaska also introduced the 'Golden Nugget' Service with the DC-6Cs to 68 destinations in Alaska and south, to Seattle and Portland. The airline purchased several Convair CV-340s to replace the old DC-3s on intra-Alaska routes. In 1958, it began a service to the Canadian coastal community of Prince Rupert, British Columbia, marking its first international route.

By 1960, the carrier was generally well known for its high-quality cabin service. It strengthened its market share by acquiring several more airlines within the state of Alaska gaining Alaska Coastal, Ellis and Cordova Airlines and Southeast Alaska Airlines. Its route network then stretched from Fairbanks south to Ketchikan and onwards to Seattle. As the carrier entered the jet age, Alaska made headlines by inaugurating a limited number of charter flights to the Soviet Union (initially in support of oil and mining operations) – even during some of the 'frostiest' days of the Cold War.

Transition to jet-powered operations started in 1961 with the Convair CV-880. It cut travelling time between Anchorage and Seattle from

*Above - Operations could be difficult in the winter-time, as this Douglas DC-3 'Starliner' shows.
Below - Alaska has used a number of different styles of stewardess uniforms – these being among the first.*



as long as eight hours on the DC-6C (or longer depending on weather) to only three hours. The Boeing 727-100 was introduced in early 1965, and became the company's signature aircraft for the next 25 years. Alaska would fly various models of the tri-jet including the series -090QC with a mixed passenger/cargo interior on services throughout the Alaskan frontier. In

March 1966, it introduced the first Lockheed L-100 (civil version of the military C-130 Hercules) into the commercial market. The carrier would introduce a total of six, primarily used on cargo charters in the oil-rich northern parts of the state, carrying drilling equipment and supplies to oil companies. Using the L-100, Alaska Airlines picked up international contracts, for example, moving heavy machinery from the United States deep into the Ecuadorian jungle for construction of a hydroelectric plant. (The L-100s would, however, see a short service life. The airline entered a financial crisis and they were pulled out of service in 1972.)

In 1967, the carrier expanded once again, swallowing competitors Alaska Coastal-Ellis and Cordova Airlines. A year later, a CV-990 joined the fleet on a temporary basis and in the next few years B720s and B707-300s were also acquired.

Problems in the 1970s

As the carrier entered the new decade, it was in dire straits financially. Ron Cosgrave and Bruce Kennedy joined the company in 1972, and the two men from Fairbanks put together a new business plan, which encouraged creditors and improved on-time performance. The construction of the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline began in 1974 and was completed in 1977; the 800 mile (1,286km) route linked Arctic Alaska with Valdez, an ice-free seaport, which was constructed at a cost of \$8 billion. The airline capitalized on this opportunity and used its fleet flying supplies, equipment and personnel. The two men also began focusing on customer service and placed the airline on course for 19 years of straight profits. Even in-flight announcements were turned to rhymes!

*A life vest neat is beneath each seat.
They're stored so we won't lose 'em.
Now fix your eyes on the stewardesses.
They'll show you how to use 'em.*

For its 75th anniversary in 2007, the airline painted a new Boeing 737 in this 'retro' scheme.





Also for the 75th anniversary, the airline held a fashion show displaying the many and varied stewardess uniforms – in many cases modelled by their original owners!

With the deregulation of commercial air services in the USA in 1979, there were opportunities for expansion. After the problems of the early 1970s, only eleven destinations were initially served, with a total of ten B727s. The airline took delivery of its first B737-200C 'Combi' in 1981 and this would prove to be as rugged and reliable as earlier machines for operations in the Alaskan frontier. It could be configured in three ways: as a pure freighter that could carry six 'igloo' containers with a maximum lift potential of 30,000lb (13,600kg); with a combination of igloos and passengers (either 32, 56 or 72); or as all-passenger with 111 seats. Alaska had its fleet

five-fold and its route network stretched to Mexico and included a scheduled service to Russia.

More Destinations

The purchase of Jet America in 1987, a Long Beach, California-based carrier that had been established in 1983, meant more destinations, such as the Californian cities of Oakland, Long Beach, Los Angeles and Orange County, plus Las Vegas, Dallas, St Louis, Chicago and Detroit. (The last two were soon discontinued because they did not fit the planned route network.) The acquisition also brought a new type of aircraft

in the form of McDonnell Douglas MD-82s and Alaska would eventually fly up to 48 MD-82s and MD-83s. Later that year, Horizon Air was purchased. It was an established regional carrier operating just a pair of leased Fairchild F27 turboprops on a niche market between Seattle, Pasco and Yakima in the state of Washington. Alaska grew steadily and acquired further carriers including Air Oregon and Transwestern Airlines of Utah which served the intermountain states including Boise, Idaho. The airline was purchased by the Alaska Air Group Inc, the holding company of Alaska Airlines and placed as a regional feeder. Today, Alaska and Horizon

ALASKA AIRLINES (AS/ASA)

Model	Seats (First Class/Economy)	Number
B737-400	144 (12/132)	34
B737-400C	4 cargo pallets/72 Economy	5
B737-400F		1
B737-700	124 (12/112)	20
B737-800	157 (16/141)	35
B737-900	172 (16/156)	12
MD-82	140 (12/128)	14 (retired)

of (eventually) six set up for quick-change operations, with the seats being attached to pallets. These were also equipped – just like their Canadian cousins flying with Pacific Western and Nordair – with gravel kits and were used to operate from and to unprepared landing strips. (Gravel kits protected engines and undercarriages from stone damage).

The larger B727-200 was also used to commence services to Portland (after a break of 22 years) and San Francisco. By the mid 1980s, the route network had increased, adding daily flights to San Jose, Spokane, Boise, Phoenix, Tucson and the resumption of services to Nome and Kotzebue. Profits soared and in 1987 Horizon Air and Jet America were acquired. By the end of the decade, its fleet had increased

Boeing 737-290C N730AS, c/n 22577 in the airline's colours from the 1980s. (Canadian Aviation Photography)



Boeing 727-90C N766AS, c/n 19728, in the carrier's 'Golden Nugget' colours of the early 1970s. (Canadian Aviation Photography)





Alaska also uses the largest variant of the Boeing 737 family – the B737-900.

combined have a route network of 90 destinations throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico.

In the 1990s, legacy carriers such as Alaska were witnessing the success of low-cost/low-fare competitors such as Reno Air, which flew in direct competition on most routes on the West Coast through Vancouver to Alaska. Alaska and Horizon began to streamline their cost structures and increased aircraft utilisation. It would be among the first legacy carriers to reshape while focusing on customer service, adopting a new motto, 'For the same price, you just get more'. This strategy worked and the combined carrier took a larger share of the West Coast market, which in turn resulted in record passenger traffic and profits. At the end of the 1990s, it employed 8,962 personnel and carried 13,604,000 passengers with 89 aircraft.

Alaska Today

The carrier is four years into an ambitious six-year business plan intended to enable it to grow and prosper in both good and bad times, and is making solid progress in achieving the goals of 'Alaska 2010'. Under the watchful eye of Chairman and CEO Bill Ayers, the author of Alaska 2010, the plan "encourages employees to deliver a superior value service which should result in increased customer satisfaction". As competition for passengers intensifies, the airline is looking at increasing its level of services as opposed to relying on the 'low-cost' approach.

With fuel prices at record high levels, the Alaska Air Group has put an action plan together to combat the serious dilemma airlines are facing. Ayers has stated that both Alaska Airlines and Horizon Air have 50% of their fuel hedged for the remainder of this year. To cut costs, the older, fuel-thirsty MD-80s have been phased out earlier than planned, leaving an all-B737 fleet.

Alaska now has a more fuel-efficient and simplified fleet of 69 NG B737s and 34 older B737-400s along with five B737-400 Combis. Horizon Air was due to phase out its 20 Bombardier

CRJ700s in September after the summer peak season. All of the 12 smaller Dash 8-Q200s are due to finish by the end of October (brought forward from the end of 2009). This will leave 33 of the modern highly fuel-efficient Dash 8-Q400 and during this transition another 12 new aircraft will be added. According to the manufacturer, the twin turboprop burns 30% less fuel and produces 30% less CO₂ emissions than a comparable jet.

Destinations

In the years following September 11, 2001, the carrier has established routes to the American Midwest and East Coast, linking its main hub of Seattle to cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Miami, New York and Orlando – these

routes generating 15% of its traffic. The West Coast accounts for approximately 50%, long-haul (including Hawaii) and intra-Alaskan traffic 20%, and the Mexican market 10%. Canadian routes only account for 5% but the airline has a 57% market share between Vancouver and Los Angeles.

Seattle is its main hub for operations with 500 daily departures to 58 destinations and this is followed by the Los Angeles basin, where it carries out 66 daily flights from Los Angeles, Burbank, Ontario, Orange County and Long Beach. Ironically, despite its name, Southern California is Alaska's largest market. Anchorage sees 55 daily departures while the San Francisco Bay area – consisting of Oakland and San Jose – sees 46.



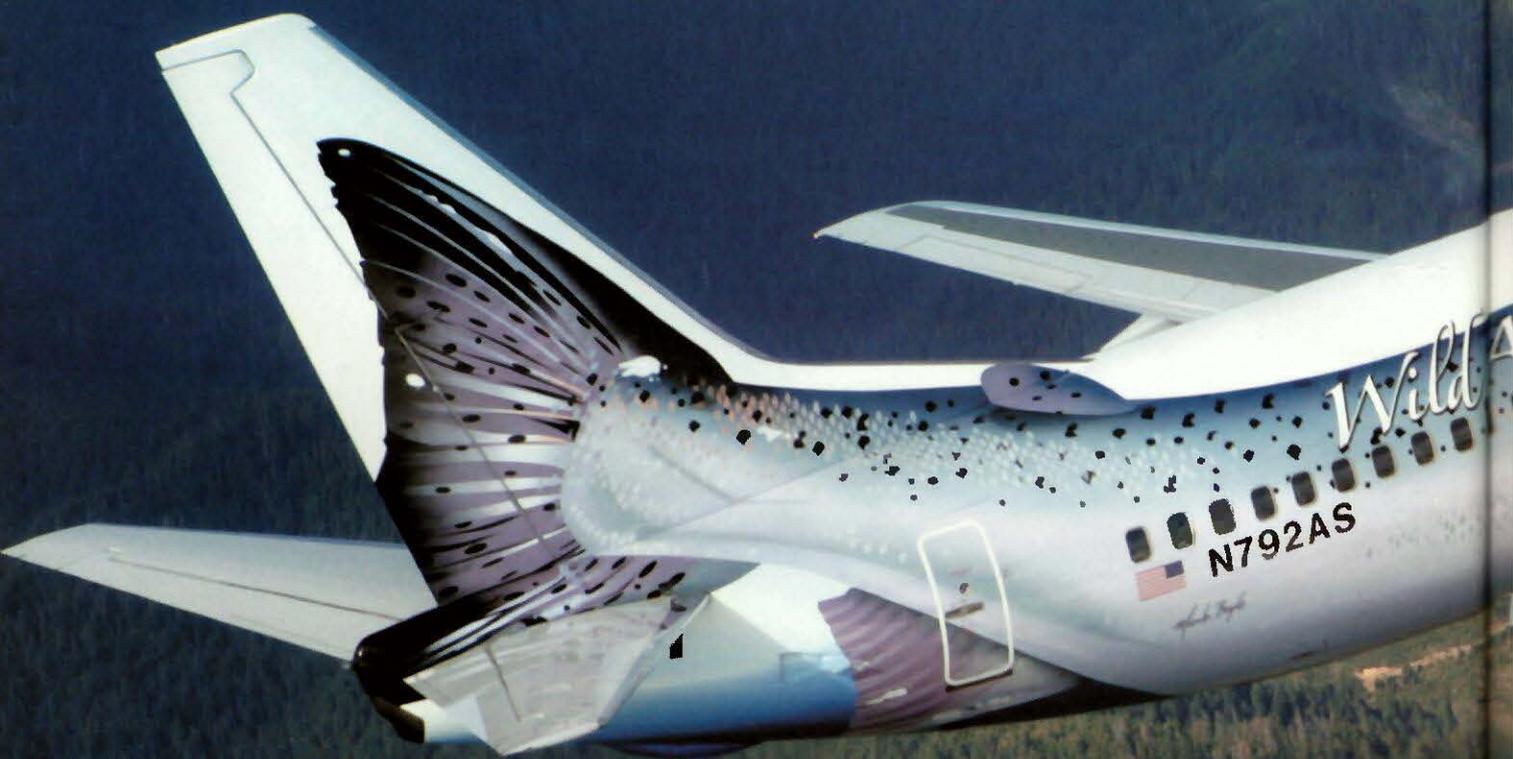
The carrier phased out its fleet of McDonnell Douglas MD-80s at the end of August 2008. (KEY – Tom Allett)



Cargo remains a significant part of Alaska's business and it uses this dedicated Boeing 737-400F.



Advertising the airline's website alaskaair.com, Boeing 737-4Q8 N774AS, c/n 25107, makes an approach to Vancouver International Airport. (KEY – Mark Nicholls)



The airline has a number of aircraft in special colours, including this 'Salmon Thirty Seven'.

Horizon Air boosts Alaska's presence by being a feeder partner and also maintains its own point-to-point network. The two carriers have an exceptional relationship with a main purpose to maximise profits and performance for the Alaska Air Group as a whole.

Technology

The company has equipped the cockpits of its B737s with 'Heads up' Guidance Systems (HGS) and has pioneered RNP (Required Navigation Performance) procedures – initially in Alaska and now across the rest of the mainland USA. RNP use results in shorter routes and less fuel consumption. This represents an economic benefit and reduces emissions of CO₂ and NO_x for the environment. Approach procedures provide improved descent minima compared with existing non-precision approaches, in many cases comparable to existing ILS approaches.

This allows the aircraft to complete landings in a broader range of weather conditions. RNP approaches typically incorporate a Continuous Descent Approach (CDA), which is more fuel efficient and quieter than normal. Together with other technologies such as Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast (ADS-B), RNP has offered another method to support greater capacity and less airspace congestion in crowded environments. It will be part of the FAA's Next Generation Air Transportation System, intended to modernise US airspace by 2025. Today, RNP technology is used at numerous airports in Alaska and is also spreading to airports in the contiguous states and throughout the world.

In 1989, Alaska introduced the HGS on a scheduled flight to reduce disruptions caused by fog. In 1995, Horizon was the first airline to use the HGS 'Fogbuster' on a turboprop. The

system uses a display that superimposes a holographic image of the approaching runway on a transparent screen positioned between the pilot and the cockpit windshield. Flight data from the instrument panel is also displayed on the screen. Alaska Airlines became one of the first carriers to use the internet for flight bookings and ticket sales in 1995. In 1999, it initiated web check-in, allowing customers to check in and print a boarding pass. In 2001, Alaska and Horizon introduced wireless check-in using a web-enabled phone or a wireless handheld device and began to offer ticketless travel using check-in kiosks throughout airports in more than 70 cities.

The Legacy Continues

Some things never change, and Alaska still attempts to differentiate itself by providing enhanced customer service when other car-



riers are cutting back. Despite originating in one of the world's last wild frontiers, Alaska's jets headed east in 2001 to the country's state capital of Washington DC and it has continued to penetrate more eastern cities, establishing a foothold at one of America's 'playground' destinations of Orlando, Florida. More recently, the tails of B737s with the trademark smiling Eskimo headed west to Hawaii linking Honolulu, Kona, Lihue and Kahului with Anchorage and Seattle. Established during the Great Depression in 1932, Alaska continues to survive and thrive as a major American-based airline and is one that is able to go toe to toe with other US 'majors'. Lincolns 'Mac' McGee's courage and vision still continues 76 years after his first Stinson took to the air on his first scheduled flight. The unique spirit of a great land called Alaska is displayed on the fins of all of its aircraft with the familiar face of the smiling Eskimo.

Seattle Tacoma is the carrier's main hub. (KEY - Torn Allett)

