



LATITUDE

The In-Flight Magazine of SimAirlines.net

August 2007

Coming to America

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Summer at British Airways

Management's Favorite Liveries

Virgin Nigeria's Startup

N622VA

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7 COVER STORY

Virgin America begins its first flights this month after three years of awaiting approval.

Cover Photo: Gerard Isaacson

Virgin America's second A320 at New York Kennedy International Airport.



5 GATHERING CLOUDS?

Heathrow disruptions have adversely affected British Airways each of the last four summers. Will the fifth time be the charm?



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What liveries does the management team at SimAirline.net like the most?



11 AFRICAN QUEEN

Like its American counterpart, Virgin Nigeria's path to takeoff was not easy.



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VIEWPOINT

It's not often that new airlines get added to SimAirline.net, much less new airlines within existing virtual airlines. However, this month will see the beginning of Virgin America's operations on 8 August. For a decade this airline has been a dream of Sir Richard Branson's, well before our first virtual airline, Virgin International Airways, opened. Virgin America's startup process has been a difficult one, so in addition to covering the latest Virgin airline, this issue will also go back and look at the last new Virgin airline, Virgin Nigeria Airways.

As summer has progressed, I've found myself with more time to be able to give to the virtual airline, but not as much as I would like. However, one thing you may have noticed is that roster updates have been far more frequent of late—over the last sixteen days of July, updates occurred on thirteen days.

This past month I had the opportunity to visit the annual Airliners International convention in Kansas City. In addition to touring the city's Airline History Museum, which features three restored TWA aircraft (a Douglas DC-3, Martin 404, and Lockheed Super Constellation), I purchased several airline timetables for SimAirline.net to expand our Discontinued Flights offerings further. Look in the coming months for additional discontinued routes and retired aircraft to become available for Air Canada, Alitalia, AOM, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Continental, Delta, Icelandair, KLM, Korean Air, Midway, Sabena, South African, Swissair, Thai, and Varig.

These additional flights (and indeed, all the services SimAirline.net provides) are all possible thanks to the generous financial support of our members in the past. However, this year that generosity has started to run dry. Last year we received contributions from 33 different members around the world—so far this year, just thirteen have contributed. While we greatly appreciate the kindness and dedication of those thirteen, we are well short of our target of 50 contributing members of any amount this year.



DN280

Virgin America's first route is from San Francisco to New York.

SimAirline.net has always been about making the virtual airline experience more enjoyable by removing constraints and giving the freedom of choice to you. Please take some time to think about the importance of SimAirline.net to you, and please consider making a contribution to ensure that we meet our goal, and more importantly, to ensure our continued future. For more information about contributing, please go [here](#). As always, information about how our finances are used is always publicly available.

Happy Flying!

Aaron Robinson

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AOL Instant Messenger: SimAirlineNet

Latitude welcomes the opinions of its readers to issues raised in the magazine. Letters should be directed to latitude@simairline.net. SimAirline.net will not print anonymous letters, but names will be withheld upon request. *Latitude* reserves the right to edit letters as it sees fit and does not guarantee publication.

NEWS BRIEFS

Alitalia Privatization Process Collapses, Airline Might Liquidate

Air One's withdrew from the Alitalia bidding process ahead of the 23 July deadline for binding bids, leaving the entire process in jeopardy. Italy's second largest airline opted to pull out of consideration after deciding that the Italian government's conditions were too restrictive. MatlinPatterson, the final remaining bidder, "don't seem to give big signs of life," said Transport Minister Alessandro Bianchi. Alitalia is losing €2 million (\$2.8 million) per day, making liquidation an increasingly likely path. Economy and Finance Minister Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa said that "aside from the sale, there is only liquidation," calling Alitalia "a loss-making company, in which the government can't inject any more cash."

Boeing Unveils 787 to Public

The Boeing Company displayed its newest product line on 8 July at the end of a weekend full of festivities. The manufacturer also announced additional orders the same weekend, raising the total to 742, a record for sales prior to its first flight.

Ryanair Complains About State Aid, EC Investigates LCCs for Receiving State Aid

Ryanair announced it will sue the European Commission (EC) for failing to take action against what it claims is illegal state aid to Air France, Alitalia, Lufthansa, and Olympic Airways and their national governments through favorable airport fees. Separately, the EC announced it would be looking into individual airports' contracts with LCCs including Ryanair that may be more favorable than published and intended to draw airlines to use their facilities.

U.S. Airlines Expand China Bids

In a flurry of activity, several U.S. airlines bidding for China rights (see July 2007 *Latitude*, p. 8) recently expanded their applications to include additional services in the hope of receiving multiple awards. The current bids by passenger airlines are as follows:

- American Airlines: Chicago-Beijing
- Continental Airlines: Newark-Shanghai
- Delta Air Lines: Atlanta-Beijing, Atlanta-Shanghai
- Hawaiian Airlines: none
- MAXjet Airways: Seattle/Tacoma-Shanghai
- Northwest Airlines: Detroit-Beijing, Detroit-Shanghai
- United Airlines: Los Angeles-Shanghai, San Francisco-Guangzhou
- US Airways: Philadelphia-Beijing, Philadelphia-Shanghai

Air France-KLM Confirms Interest in Iberia

Iberia Airlines' Latin American network is even more popular than ever—for suitors. Air France-KLM announced it would be bidding for the airline in cooperation with Apax Partners. British Airways has joined with the Texas Pacific Group, while Lufthansa is also an interested party.

New Management Structure for EADS

Airbus parent EADS revealed a new management structure in which the dual nationality and co-CEO arrangement were eliminated. Effective immediately, former EADS co-CEO Tom Enders was named Airbus CEPO, the fourth in thirteen months, while former EADS co-CEO and Airbus President and CEO Louis Gallois was elevated to sole CEO of EADS. "France didn't beat Germany and Germany didn't beat France. It's EADS which has won," said newly elected French President Nicolas Sarkozy. German Chancellor Angela Merkel added that "both sides are winners" and that future decision-making will be business-driven rather than political.

Southwest's Kelleher and Barrett to Step Down

Southwest Airlines legends Herb Kelleher and Colleen Barrett will step down from their positions as chairman and president in 2008, but remain as company employees. The two had been part of the company since its inception four decades ago. Successors were not announced, but the likely choice is CEO Gary Kelly, a 21-year veteran of the airline.

TAM Crash Prompts Review of Congonhas Safety

Following Brazil's worst air disaster, the recent runway overrun and subsequent crash of TAM flight 3054 in Sao Paulo that killed all 187 people on board and twelve on the ground, the Congonhas airport was closed for ten days and reopened to limited traffic. A third airport will be built for Brazil's largest city will be built on a site to be chosen in the coming months. The airport disruption and ATC issues in the country have delayed or cancelled hundreds of flights, leading to the sacking of Defense Minister Waldir Pires, who was responsible for the military-run ATC system.

Gulf Air CEO Resigns, Airline Under Investigation

Gulf Air CEO Andre Dose, former CEO of Swiss and Crossair, resigned just four months into his tenure at the airline after Chairman Mahmood Hashim Al Kooheji confirmed that the airline is under "criminal investigation" by Bahraini officials. Dose's restructuring program will remain in place.

Summer Storms



Mike Moores

British Airways has been beset with operational problems at Heathrow over each of the last four summers, hurting but not destroying the quarter's profitability. Will Europe's largest airline make it through this summer without a problem? Here's what happened from 2003 through 2006. Additional disruptions have occurred outside of the busy summer period, but these received the most attention.

10 August 2006

Twenty-one terrorists were arrested as part of a plot to destroy up to ten American, Continental, and United airliners departing from London using liquid-based explosives. All carry-on luggage on U.K. flights was banned. The estimated cost of the disruption was an estimated £100 million.

10 August – 400 flights from Gatwick and Heathrow cancelled

11 August – 250 flights, including 30% of Heathrow's shorthaul services

12 August – 10 U.S. and 31 shorthaul flights

13 August – 10 U.S. and 118 shorthaul flights

14 August – 5 longhaul and 39 shorthaul flights

15 August – 26 shorthaul flights

16 August – 3 longhaul and 43 shorthaul flights

17 August – 19 shorthaul flights

11 August 2005

British Airways cancelled all flights at Heathrow following an unofficial walkout by catering company Gate Gourmet employees that spread to British Airways ground staff. Some 600 flights were

cancelled in the afternoon and evening of 11 July and most of 12 July. Flight operations returned to normal on 15 July, although catering was affected for an additional week. The cost of the stoppage was estimated at £35-£45 million.

23 August 2004

Just days after reaching a labor deal with its check-in staff and baggage handlers and averting a strike, British Airways cancelled nearly ninety flights across three days due to staff shortages at Heathrow. Volunteers from across the company, including CEO Rod Eddington, helped at Heathrow to ease the disruption.

7 August 2004

The breakdown of baggage belts at Heathrow Terminals 1 and 4 and a major backlog caused by weather-related cancellations resulted in over 7,000 pieces of luggage remaining at Heathrow rather than being loaded on board their flights. Recovery included filling an entire 777, cabin included, with solely baggage and flying to New York.

18 July 2003

An unofficial strike by check-in staff and baggage handlers at Heathrow's Terminal 1 forced the cancellation of all flights from the terminal that evening and the following day. The strike spread to Terminal 4 and was not fully resolved until 22 July.

VA SPOTLIGHT

Alitalia Virtual



An A319 over Italy

Alitalia is the twenty-seventh largest airline in the world and the sixth largest in Europe. The airline's name comes from *ali* (wings) and *Italia* (Italy). Alitalia's operations also include regional subsidiary Alitalia Express, and some flights of Air Alps.

Alitalia is often criticized for its dual hub system of Milan and Rome. While Milan is the premier hub of the company, Rome serves nearly all the same shorthaul markets and many longhaul destinations as well. Splitting operations has resulted in lower frequency on key longhaul routes, hurting business traffic.

Alitalia also maintains a strong presence at Linate Airport, the closest airport to Milan. It flies to major European business centers as well as a high-frequency shuttle (up to eighteen daily flights) to Rome.

Alitalia has been under financial stress for several years, and an ongoing sale of the airline by the Italian government has all but

failed [see *News Briefs*, p. 4].

Previously planned mergers with both Air France and KLM were called off because of concerns about Alitalia's financial health and the viability of its two-hub network. The airline's financial concerns led it to cancel its pending orders for 747-400s, aircraft delivery slots that were quickly picked up by Virgin Atlantic.

Interesting Facts:

- Alitalia is the third largest MD-80 operator in the world, behind only American and Delta.
- Labor action at Alitalia is highly common, with strikes by labor unions a regular occurrence.
- Alitalia has one of the highest employee ownership stakes in the world—the airline is currently 49% owned by the Italian government and employees, and 2% by SkyTeam partner Air France-KLM.



An MD-82 over Switzerland



Harm Rutten

The newest Virgin airline takes off on 8 August with its first flight from New York Kennedy to San Francisco. After a three year fight to receive approval from the U.S. Department of Transportation and nearly a decade of Sir Richard Branson wanting a U.S. domestic airline, Virgin America is a reality.

Virgin America is thinking big, and has thirty-four A319s and A320s planned for its fleet. As is tradition at Virgin-branded airlines, the aircraft will be specially named. It has already announced its first six cities (see below), and plans to expand to an additional four over the next year and as many as thirty within the next five years. With \$177 million in start-up capital, Virgin America has one of the highest initial investments of any airline in the world. By contrast, JetBlue had a then-record \$100 million when it began flying in 1999.

Announced Routes

- 8 August – San Francisco-Los Angeles
- 8 August – San Francisco-New York Kennedy
- 29 August – Los Angeles-New York Kennedy
- 26 September – San Francisco-Washington Dulles
- 10 October – San Francisco-Las Vegas
- 24 August – Los Angeles-Washington Dulles

“Virgin’s airlines worldwide were the original foundation of SimAirline.net,” says Managing Director Aaron Robinson. “We’re proud to be able to offer the world’s newest and most exciting airline and its additional choices to our pilots.”

Among the features that make Virgin America unique are:

- the largest personal TVs of any U.S. airline
- unique soothing on-board lighting
- on-board power at every seat
- cabin service ordered via personal seatback screen
- 55” pitch in First Class
- massaging chairs in First Class
- Internet access

With this wide range of innovative services, Virgin America is clearly more than just a low-cost carrier—it is seeking to redefine the standards of air travel and provide high quality at an excellent value.

Come 8 August, Virgin America will take off for the first time after a difficult journey through the DOT approval process and opposition from labor unions and rival airlines. But after that first takeoff, the adventure will really be just beginning.



Virgin America will include the world’s first in-flight mood lighting, which will adjust based on the time of day.

Styles of the Skies

A look at the favorite liveries of SimAirline.net management and their reasons for their choice.

Midwest Airlines, 2002-present

“The wonderful elegant lines, rich colors and excellent tail logo all go together to form a simple yet very classy livery.”

-Nick Anderson



Delta Air Lines, 1961-1997

“The Delta widget livery is just a classic. It is a simple color scheme that was easily recognized where ever it was seen. It reminds people of a time when flying was for the few, and a true adventure to go on.”

-Jonathan Barron



American Airlines, 1968-present

“American Airlines’ livery is a classic. The polished chrome along with the red, white, and blue stripes and American's AA logo with the eagle above it are recognizable worldwide. On a personal note, I grew up traveling a lot and most of the time it was on American, at least every month. American Airlines and its livery is always a welcome sight, wherever I am in the world.”

-Casey Dalal



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Jade Cargo

“At first glance, Jade Cargo's livery seems rather plain. However, when looking closer, it becomes more meaningful and reveals its true beauty. The livery features velocity and balance. The nose is like an arrow, synonymous with speed and efficiency. Then come the Chinese characters, exotic and beautiful. 'JADE CARGO' itself has been painted in a way that contributes to the feel of the livery. Finally, the tail is like Yin and Yang. Together these all create balance and unity.”

-Sébastien Devogele

Promech Air

“These were planes that I grew up watching. While the scheme is a ‘stock scheme’ used all over Alaska in various colour sets, Promech blends my favourite shades of green in their Beavers. The tail logo, while also a stock logo, is one of my favourite designs, and I use a modified version for many of my personal repaints.”

-Mark Jahnke

US Airways, 2005-present

“An airline's livery tells a lot about its history. Unlike most airlines, whose livery has been basically the same with slight modifications, US Airways' has been in constant evolution. Its current livery reflects its past and the airlines that now compromise it.”

-Dennis Negrón

British Airways, 1984-1997

“The livery of a national airline should reflect back on the national character of the country it serves. No livery has done this better than the British Airways livery designed by Landor Associates—conservative, business-like, and proper.”

-Aaron Robinson



Frank Doering



Ron Peel



Tim Rees

HUB FOCUS

London Gatwick Airport (LGW/EGKK)

London Gatwick Airport is the U.K.'s second largest airport and is notable for being the busiest single-runway airport in the world. In 2006 the airport served 34.2 million passengers, 25th in the world.

The airport is a major hub for both British Airways and Virgin Atlantic Airways. British Airways bases its entire 737 fleet here to fly to secondary European cities and to supplement domestic and business routes from Heathrow, while both fly to Caribbean and more leisure-oriented destinations. Gatwick is also the preferred London airport for charter airlines.

The British Airports Authority is pushing for a true second runway, but the British government is in favor of expanding Heathrow and Stansted rather than Gatwick.

From Gatwick, transatlantic service is available to seventeen cities in Canada and the U.S. on British Airways, Continental, Delta, Northwest, and Virgin Atlantic, and a further fourteen destinations in the Caribbean on British Airways and Virgin Atlantic.

GB Airways and Virgin Sun combine to fly to 43 destinations in the Mediterranean, while British Airways serves 56 cities with its 737s. In addition, British Airways offers flights to Abidjan, Dammam, Kano, and Seychelles; Emirates to Dubai; Virgin



Ben Pritchard

A closer look at Gatwick's runway layout. Note the minimal space between the two.

Atlantic to Athens and Port Harcourt; and Virgin Nigeria to Lagos.

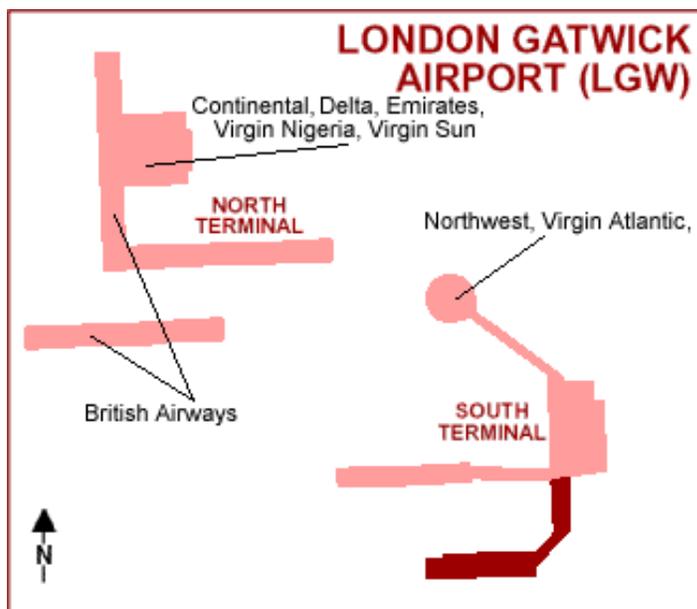
Interesting Facts:

- Technically, Gatwick does have two runways—but 8L/26R can not handle ILS approaches, and is only used when 8R/26L is non-operational. Both can not be used at one time because of the minimal spacing.
- The name Gatwick dates back to 1241, and comes from "goat farm" in Old English.



Kevin Murphy

Gatwick's passenger bridge is the largest in the world and is tall enough to allow 747s to pass underneath.



“Coloniser, c’est transporter.”

-French proverb



Youri Thonon

Every Virgin airline that has taken to the skies seems to face difficulties in starting up. Virgin Nigeria was no exception, but faced unique challenges due to its location in a developing country. The following is edited and excerpted from Aaron Robinson’s essay “Coloniser, c’est transporter”: The Case of Virgin Nigeria,” the full text of which is available [here](#).

Nigeria, one of the most important countries in Africa due to both its large population and oil production, has long been without an effective airline of its own. Given the country’s extensive international trade and high corruption levels, the commercial aviation sector has been an important but underperforming industry for much of its history.

State-owned Nigeria Airways, which began operations in 1958, was one of the leading airlines in the continent before mismanagement and safety concerns eventually grounded the airline in May 2003. Allegations have been made that former government officials looted over \$400 million from the company, accelerating its demise.

As part of his party’s goal of encouraging private sector development in order to reform the economy and reduce corruption, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo announced a search for an international strategic investor to provide financial and technical assistance in creating a replacement to Nigeria Airways.

South African Airways, a previous alliance partner of Nigeria Airways, was seeking to expand its reach throughout the continent following the liberalization of the African aviation market by the Yamoussoukro Agreement. South African had already bought a (now-disposed-of) 49% stake in Air Tanzania, and coveted a similar opportunity in Western Africa to expand its scope network.

South African was soon selected and began planning

Nigerian Eagle Airways, but negotiations broke down, for reasons which remain unclear. After a second round of bidding, Virgin Atlantic was selected, not just for financial reasons, but also because of the greater stability the company offered (South African had recently undergone two leadership shakeups), its positive and growing presence in the Nigerian market since its entry in 2001, and in the hope that investment by foreign companies in non-oil industries would encourage others to follow.

Virgin Atlantic provided a 49% ownership share, with the remainder held by Nigerian institutional investors. Initial capitalization was set at \$50 million, with plans to eventually expand this via an IPO on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. An estimated 20,000 jobs would be created both directly and indirectly by the new carrier.

Prior to Virgin Nigeria, air travel to most of the world (or even other parts of Africa) from Nigeria typically meant traveling via one of the major European gateways. Most longhaul services to Nigeria are operated by national airlines such as Air France, British Airways, KLM, or Lufthansa, with Lagos being the primary gateway.

Virgin Nigeria’s entry to the skies was not without complications however. Public opinion was initially against the new company, citing the disgrace of such a large foreign ownership and the prominent use of the Virgin brand. “It is a private line, not a national carrier,” said Razak Saidu of the National Union of Air Transport Employees, the country’s airline labor union.

Former Nigeria Airways workers threatened legal and sabotage actions to prevent Virgin Nigeria from commencing operations unless the government paid the \$68 million in

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pensions and salary owed to the company's 4,800 employees. Many Nigerians also viewed the privatization of such public services as a government failure in meeting social responsibilities.

The irony of a British company announcing its participation in the new Nigerian flag carrier on October 1, Nigeria's Independence Day, did not go unnoticed. "Bravo! The British are Back" one critique was titled. Despite the difficulties at home, Virgin Nigeria began operations on 28 June 2005 from Lagos to London.

Since it was first announced, Virgin Nigeria made it clear that it intended to fly to the U.S., Nigeria's second largest trading partner. Although airline services between North America and Western Africa have been virtually nonexistent for the last quarter-century ("a backwater compared with the North Atlantic highway" wrote one author), there is certainly demand for such a connection, as nearly 10% of American imported oil comes from Nigeria.

However, Virgin Nigeria's aspirations soon became a battleground for the American goal of ending the restrictions imposed by the Bermuda II Agreement (see *Bye-bye Bermuda II*, May 2007 p. 5). Continental Airlines, the fifth-largest U.S. airline, announced in December 2004 that it would begin Newark-Lagos service the following year.

Continental was widely expected to be successful on the route not only because of its strong international performance, but also because of its dominance in Houston, the home city for many U.S. oil corporations.

In fact, demand for Houston-Nigeria services is so strong that for many years, British Airways, unable to serve Houston from Heathrow due to Bermuda II, served Nigeria from Gatwick in order to assure it would retain the lucrative oil traffic. In March Continental applied to serve Accra, Ghana as well, intending to use the one-hour distant Accra as a relatively safe stopover location compared to Lagos for its crews.

Within two weeks of Continental's announcement, Virgin Nigeria filed a request with the U.S. Department of Transportation to fly between Lagos and New York. As part of its application, Virgin Nigeria noted that "although Virgin Nigeria is aware that U.S. airlines seeking entry into Nigeria have experienced difficulties in the past, the Government of Nigeria has assured Virgin Nigeria that it would promptly approve air service proposed by any U.S. air carrier," a *quid pro quo*.

But Virgin Nigeria quickly became a pawn in the U.S.-U.K. dispute over Heathrow access rights; the U.S. rejected Virgin Nigeria's application on the grounds that the bilateral agreement between the U.S. and Nigeria requires that airlines operating between the two countries be corporate citizens of those countries. Since Virgin Atlantic held a 49% stake in Virgin Nigeria, Virgin Nigeria should be viewed as a British airline and not a Nigerian one, and potentially also subject to the restrictions of Bermuda II.

Nigeria soon retaliated by denying Continental's proposal to fly to Lagos. Although Virgin Nigeria finally received U.S. access rights the following year (and has yet to begin service), the difficulties involved in securing them were certainly troubling. Delta has since begun flying New York-Lagos (see *Spreading Wings*, June 2007 p. 5).

Another concern for Virgin Nigeria has been that despite the original intent of governmental noninterference, that standard has not been fully upheld. In January 2006, following the refusal of several Nigerian airlines to transport Hajj pilgrims to Mecca due to insufficient government payments, President Obasanjo ordered Virgin Nigeria to immediately use all its available aircraft to transport stranded Muslims from Abuja. (Able-bodied Muslims are expected to make an annual pilgrimage, the Hajj, to Mecca at least once in their lifetimes.)

Saudi Arabia only allows Hajj flights within a certain timeframe, and authorities had allowed for an extension to 8:00 AM on 6 January. Virgin Nigeria cancelled its scheduled flights to Johannesburg and London, and planned to transport pilgrims to Jeddah (the nearest airport to Mecca), departing the night of 5 January. Although the flight was expected to arrive after the deadline, it was ordered to proceed anyways, and was eventually turned back by Saudi authorities.

Finally, Nigeria and other developing countries are potential beneficiaries of a proposal by French President Jacques Chirac first announced in January 2005. Chirac proposed levying a development tax on all airline flights worldwide, with funds raised being used to aid development in poor countries. In France alone, the tax is expected to raise €210 million (\$248 million) annually. Then-United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan hailed Chirac's initiative as an "innovative source of financing" to help reduce poverty worldwide.

The airline industry has decried the new tax, arguing that it would hurt the very nations it intends to help. The Association of European Airlines pointed out that "passengers...are already contributing, as customers, to an industry which is of incalculable importance to the developing world....Airlines bring in the tourists who, in many disadvantaged countries of the world, constitute one of the most important sources of money and jobs. Air links facilitate trade, and give local producers access to global markets."

The tax-for-aid proposal certainly has the potential to retard the foreign investment in Nigeria that Obasanjo's government was hoping for through the creation and operation of Virgin Nigeria. While the airline has fared well thus far and has an ambitious growth plan, it remains uncertain if the carrier can remain viable in the long run given Nigeria's history of economic instability.

However, the carrier's insulation from the government through the lack of public ownership is a positive step that many other developing countries are still reluctant to take. One final concern must be Virgin Atlantic's willingness to maintain its support in the face of adverse conditions in the future, and how well Virgin Nigeria would fare without the foundation of its British backing.

THE TAIL SECTION



FedEx recently took delivery of the final A300 to roll off the assembly line. The aircraft type was Airbus' first project and the first widebody twin ever produced. The final production count stands at 819 for the A300 and its smaller sister, the A310. Of those, 122 are flown by FedEx.

JetBlue Airways is featured in the recently released "The Simpsons Movie," in which the misanthropic Montgomery Burns takes the place of JetBlue founder and chairman David Neeleman, vowing to make changes to the airline for its "congenial customer service and overly indulgent amenities." JetBlue's role in the movie comes just months after the airline fell out of public favor after extensive winter-related cancellations and delays that cost Neeleman his position as CEO.

OBITUARY: Air Tahiti Nui founder and former CEO Nelson Lévy died of a heart attack on 1 July at the age of 58. Lévy managed the Tahiti Tourism Promotion Office from 1992 and transformed it into what is now the GIE Tahiti Tourisme. After founding Air Tahiti Nui in 1996 to support the organization's goal of promoting Tahiti as a tourist destination, he left Tahiti Tourisme to become the airline's first CEO in 1998, the year it began operations.

The latest airline concept to try to take to the skies is Smoker's International Airways, or Smintair. The airline will begin flying from Dusseldorf to Nagoya in early 2008. The idea? All-business class, allowing smoking, which nearly every airline has banned onboard. A special air system will result in cleaner than normal air. "People think the cabin will be full of smoke, which is bollocks," says founder Alexander Schoppmann. "The air on Smintair will be more refreshing than on a normal flight. You will not even notice the smell of somebody smoking a cigarette or pipe in the next seat." Why the opening route? It's twelve hours away from Germany, many Germans and Japanese smoke, and Dusseldorf has a large Japanese population. Perhaps the best part about the new venture has been a headline by the Washington Post about the company: "Nicotine Niche or Pipe Dream?"



Virgin Blue recently announced the name for its transpacific subsidiary: V Australia. The name was chosen from several naming contest finalists. As part of Singapore Airlines' ownership stake in Virgin Atlantic, the Virgin name can't be used by Virgin Blue outside of Australia. However, Singapore is considering selling its stake, which would mean an easy rebranding. Flights begin in late 2008.