

Boeing's deadly 737 Max resumes US commercial flights

Bryan Dyne

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On Tuesday, American Airlines carried out the first US commercial flight of the deadly Boeing 737 Max 8, nearly two years after it was grounded in the aftermath of two crashes—Lion Air Flight 610 in October 2018 in Indonesia and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 in March 2019—killing a combined total of 346 men, women and children.

The flight, which reportedly took place without incident, was between Miami International Airport and New York's LaGuardia Airport. American has thus far scheduled the Max 8 to fly a single route, from Miami to New York City and back, once a day.

United Airlines is currently slated to restart flights of the Max 8 on February 11, and Southwest Airlines has said it will resume using the aircraft sometime in the second quarter of next year. Delta Air Lines, the fourth major US carrier, does not own any Max 8 jets.

Predictably, Wall Street hailed the flight, with Boeing stock spiking after the opening bell. The company's share prices have been on a generally upward trend since late October, increasing by about 50 percent. At that time, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) signaled that it was getting ready to unground the aircraft.

Wall Street, however, is celebrating not just rising share prices. Nearly two years after the second crash, not a single corporate executive or federal regulator involved in designing and certifying the lethal airplane has gone to jail for his role in the deaths of 346 passengers and crew members, as well as one diver in Indonesia who was killed during the search of the wreckage. The relaunch of the plane in the US is further confirmation that, as long as one's actions are in the interests of the financial oligarchy, one can get away with murder.

It is worth noting that Boeing got off scot free after

the first crash, which was largely swept under the rug by the FAA and the media. It was only after the second crash five months later that European and other international regulators grounded the Max 8. Even then, Boeing's CEO at the time, Dennis Muilenburg, declared that the plane was perfectly safe, and the FAA refused to ground it for two days. President Donald Trump tweeted his support for Boeing and Muilenburg.

So far, the only other country to approve the Max 8 for commercial flights is Brazil. On December 9, even before the American Airlines flight, the jet was put into service by Gol Airlines, Brazil's largest airline and one of Boeing's biggest customers. Canadian and European regulators are expected to give their approval soon, with other international aviation safety agencies expected to follow their lead.

The plane was recently ungrounded by the FAA after 20 months of what the agency claims was a "comprehensive and methodical safety review process." For his part, Boeing CEO David Calhoun hailed the ungrounding as a confirmation of the company's "core values of safety, quality and integrity."

No weight can be given to such words. Boeing did everything it could throughout the entire development and production process of the Max 8 to hide fundamental flaws in the plane's design. The FAA became aware of the risks of the new plane but went ahead and certified it. Neither Boeing nor the FAA, with the complicity of the airline unions, told either airline workers or the flying public of the dangers they faced.

These risks included both inadequate training and poor design. The total training given pilots flying the Max 8 was a one hour video, compared to the normal requirement that pilots spend hundreds of hours on

simulators to be certified to fly a new plane. Boeing pushed the claim that virtually no special training, a major cost to airline companies, was required as part of its drive to undercut its major international rival, European-based Airbus. This was given the green light by the FAA and the pilots' unions.

The mechanical problems of the Max 8 were even more severe. The most well known of these is the now infamous auto-piloting system called the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS). The software was installed to compensate for the plane's inherent tendency to stall, a byproduct of attaching a newer, larger engine onto the half-century-old Boeing 737 chassis.

This was done to avoid having to design a new model, thereby sharply lowering the cost and duration of the process of design, production, training and certification. As internal documents that have since come out reveal, Boeing's fatal rush to market a new medium-range commercial jet, intended to serve as the company's workhorse aircraft, was, like all subsequent decisions, driven by considerations of profit, market share and stock price, with safety at best a secondary consideration.

MCAS was designed and installed as a relatively inexpensive fix to the stalling problem. The existence of this system was not even mentioned in the pilot training manuals. Pilots were not told that the plane's computers were given the ability to override pilot controls if the system deemed it necessary. Boeing ultimately gave MCAS 10 times the control over the pitch of the plane than it told test pilots, meaning it could crash the plane given faulty inputs.

This is exactly what happened in both crashes. Each plane's angle of attack sensor wrongly indicated a stall, and because only a single sensor was tied to MCAS, rather than the industry redundancy standard of two or three sensors for critical functions, the software forced both flights into an unrecoverable dive. Black box recordings of the pilots bear this out. They plunged to their deaths, along with hundreds of others, desperately trying to manually override MCAS.

Documents that have surfaced in the past two years from numerous investigations into the Max 8 show that Boeing was very aware of the problems with the MCAS and the Max 8 as a whole. Leaked internal emails reflect dismay and incredulity among employees

over the development of the Max 8. One commented, "This is a joke. This airplane is ridiculous." A different message stated, "I'll be shocked if the FAA passes this turd."

Mark Forkner, Boeing's chief technical pilot at the time of the aircraft's development, called MCAS "egregious," and noted that it was "running rampant" in Boeing's simulators, causing crashes.

But despite such incriminating evidence, no criminal charges have been laid and there have been no high-level arrests. Most notably, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, controlled by the Democrats, despite publishing a damning report showing Boeing risked countless lives, proposed no actions to hold executives or officials accountable. There were no calls for criminal prosecution, nor were any financial penalties imposed. Now, with the relaunch of the Max 8, both the company and its big shareholders are positioned to reap massive profits, potentially at the cost of more human lives.



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