



# Virtual Airlines

## Pacific Airways: a 'Small hometown' virtual airline

**T**his issue, I take a look at what could be called a 'Small hometown' virtual airline. Most virtual airlines copy the real world, but some create their very own mark, leaving the big names behind to forge their own path. Pacific Airways falls into the latter category. From humble beginnings in 1997, the airline has seen off more than a few of those 'big names' in its almost 20-year history. As a partner of American Flight Airways, the two carriers offer an assortment of flights, aircraft and bases to enjoy. I spoke to current Pacific Airways CEO, Rob Scott, about what makes the airline so special.

### Sweet Fleet

A common feature of all the VAs I've covered has been a diverse fleet. Pacific Airways is no exception. The fleet largely depends on the type of flying you want to do.

Split into five separate groups,

Pacific offers the standard passenger traffic via the Passenger Group, which encompasses all of Pacific Airways' ops. For box haulers, there's Pacific Cargo, flying out of Los Angeles, New York and London to all over the globe.

For those short on time to fly, the Express Division, Pacific Blue, offers pilots flights of two hours or less, with aircraft that hold less than 100 people.

If the mainline flying doesn't tickle your fancy, there's the Floatplane Division, flying out of Anchorage, Alaska. Expect rough weather and backwater destinations on that one.

Finally the Helicopter Division will satisfy whirlybird pilots, with trips available from several hubs. From commuting from O'Hare to downtown Chicago, to flying tourists down the Grand Canyon, there's something for everyone.

With such a diverse selection of missions, the fleet of aircraft available

is unsurprisingly diverse. From the Airbus A319 to the Boeing 777 for the mainline, to the Cessna 404, Beechcraft 1900 and up to the CRJ 900 for Pacific Blue, the choice of passenger aircraft by itself is a great thing indeed.

Then there's the Cargo ops which features the usual suspects alongside a few great oddballs like the Fokker 50 and the Cessna 208.

Bringing up the rest of the fleet for the floatplane ops are the humble Twin Otters and Beavers, along with the Augusta A109E helicopter for those special customers.

Speaking of the 'special customers', hidden away in the fleet is a cracking set of private jets for the airline 'Silverjet' operations. These luxury aircraft include the Cessna Citation, Kingair 350 and even a Boeing 737-700 BBJ! It turned out Silverjet operates as a separate entity under the Pacific Airways family, and it

comes with a rather nice addition; more on that later.

The entire fleet is available as freeware downloads from the fleet page and both FSX and FS2004 are well supported. Interestingly, there are plenty of FS2002 aircraft in there too! If you have payware aircraft, liveries are also available to download as well.

### Hubs

Pacific Airways likes to get around and with a name like Pacific, it's no surprise to find the airline's main hub is in Seattle. Miami, Denver, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and London, all operate as separate entities with pilots able to choose the hub of their choice on joining. From there a pilot can explore the world. Each hub is managed by a hub manager and has its own unique feel. One of the nicest things I saw was at the Seattle hub, where during the aftermath of the



American Flight Airways 757 is just one of the many aircraft available in a diverse fleet



Routes from the vast plains to the mountains are easy to find



Although every aircraft is available as a freeware download, payware add-ons are well supported, such as the old 737 seen here



A dedicated team of livery creators has the entire fleet covered



From the smallest to the newest, the 787 Dreamliner



The biggest bird in the sky, the A380 is available for those who can handle her

Nepal earthquake, the manager was willing to donate \$10 for every pilot who flew into Katmandu in the sim. If he could raise \$300, Microsoft would double it. Little things like that can make a difference.

While pilots are assigned to a particular hub, they can fly from any hub they wish, adding a level of flexibility that seems to be the cornerstone of Pacific Airways.

### The life of a pilot

Pacific Airways rank structure is a little different to some VAs. Instead of working your way through the ranks,

you simply accumulate hours. With aircraft types split into six categories, pilots only need to accrue a total of 40-plus hours to have the whole fleet at their disposal. That openness is a great incentive, noting it's not going to be 100-plus hours before you get to fly that 767. The 40-hour-plus rule is a great thing. Becoming a pilot with Pacific Airways also opens up the chance to mingle with a great community. Rob admits the range of pilots isn't what it once was, with real world commitments often taking priority, but the community forums still have plenty of activity on them.



It's got 19 seats but no aircraft is too small for Pacific Airways



Heading north comes with its own challenges



American Flight Airways has a more diverse selection of liveries than you'd think



The liveries come in a wide variety of choices

Speaking of forums, there are more than just one. Both Pacific Airways and its sister airline, American Flight Airways, have separate forums, each with their own theme, plus each hub has its own forum as well. New pilots are encouraged to join the forums and get involved. Interestingly, younger members, often viewed with scepticism by the older pilots, are seen as a huge resource. Forum use is strictly moderated and the staff have been known to speak directly to parents of prospective young pilots to discuss how the VA works, how their teenager will benefit and how

that teen is looked after. Rob Scott commented: "Parents are often surprised at how much effort we take to make sure the airline is a fun and safe place to be,"

A unique aspect of Pacific Airways is the PIREP (Pilot Report) system. Most airlines use either their own bespoke ACARS (Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System) system to record flights, or use more generic systems such as XACARS (the X-Plane plug-in). Pacific Airways uses a manual system set on pilots reporting their hours themselves. Using the 'Honour system' 



The CRJ is a popular choice at Pacific Airways



A320 at dusk, enjoying her natural environment

pilots are trusted to 'do the right thing' when submitting a flight. While this seems a bit risky from the outside, the staff can easily tell if a logbook has been falsified and in Rob's 15-plus years with Pacific, he says he can 'count on one hand' the number of times action has need to be taken. "We did look into an ACARS system a while ago, but pilot feedback wasn't great, so we decided to put our efforts into something else," Rob tells me. "We'd rather that the airline was moulded by what the pilots want, rather than what the staff think the pilot wants."

That sentiment is pretty typical of Pacific Airways. The main ethos is having fun which is why VATSIM flying isn't mandatory. That doesn't mean VATSIM isn't an option and it doesn't mean that you can't have fun on VATSIM either. Every week, there are several VATSIM fly-in events for members to attend spread over

several time zones. This way members from around the world will have a chance to fly with friends at a time that's convenient for them.

### Fancy flights

As I touched on earlier, there's a wide array of hubs, aircraft and routes to choose from. And with so many options, pilots could find themselves spoilt for choice. Both Pacific Airways and American Flight Airlines offer trips all over the world but if you're stuck for choice, you can make use of one of the airline's most innovative features: the Silverjet dispatch system. Normally, using a dispatch system can seem incredibly difficult. I fly my own A320 but the likes of Aerosoft's PFPX scare me enough to keep things simple. Silverjet dispatch is as easy as it gets. Described as a 'real time flight creation tool', you simply enter your departure airport, a rough idea of how long you want to

fly for and the size of airport you want to fly to and the system automatically generates a flight plan for you. And that's it. You can email the route to yourself, or for added help, you can also send the route to that great free dispatch software system, SimBrief, to generate a proper dispatch sheet. The simBrief is seamlessly integrated with Silverjet and gives pilots a full dispatch including full NOTAMs, fuel planning, winds and more.

The silverJest system was developed in-house at Pacific Airways and is completely bespoke for the airline. The staff and IT guys are very proud of it, and it is easy to understand why.

### Conclusion

Pacific Airways is certainly a different kind of VA. It's not quite as busy as some of the bigger ones out there but the small-town feel offers a friendly

place to fly that's as welcome as 'mom's home-made apple pie'. The staff are a dedicated group who work to give pilots what they want and ensure that fun is what drives the airline forward. Innovative systems such as the SilverJet dispatch program gives pilots a quick and easy way to get flying while the mentoring of younger pilots keeps the new generation interested in a world of the XBOX One and PS4s.

For nearly 20 years this VA has operated and it will go on for another 20 it seems thanks to a dedicated membership and staff. Welcome to the world - Pacific Airways style. As it says on its website: "Isn't the world a small place?"

**My thanks to Rob Scott for taking the time to chat with me.**

*If you'd like your VA to be featured in PC Pilot, email me at: [mail@pcpilot.net](mailto:mail@pcpilot.net).*

**By Jessica Bannister-Pearce** ■

Happy to be home, the CRJ returning to Pacific Airways' home hub at Seattle

