

Dear Sir,

Apologies for late entry.

Background: Ansett Airlines operated early model jet transports, DC9 and B727, from the mid nineteen-sixties to early nineteen-eighties when the DC9 retired, and early-nineties when the B727 retired. TAA similar.

Both those aircraft types were a challenge to fly and to operate compared to the current jet transports.

Ansett operated, all jet types, about 500 sectors a day by nineteen ninety, and in all that time Ansett, so far as the jets were concerned, so far as I can remember, didn't scratch an aeroplane or bruise a passenger.

The rest of the world eventually took notice of this, and throughout the nineteen eighties there was a constant trickle of lookers come out from various overseas sources, basically to see how the Australians were doing it.

Leaving aside the war-time contingent who brought the airplanes in and who retired mostly during the seventies, the pilots with few exceptions were ex-GA. Very few had tertiary qualifications. Not many had done matriculation. Most were tradesmen of various sorts, including a large number of ex-BHP and ex-Qantas apprentices. For the most part they had done several years in GA as flying instructors, charter pilots and cropdusters. (Don't look down on crop-dusting. It is a very demanding and high-tech game.)

This individual left Australia in 1987 and flew foreign from then until retirement in 2006. (Mandated by European rules at age 65.)

That included exposure to the training and operations culture of a number of foreign operations including Cathay, British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and Air Pacific.

We all wondered back then how the Australians were managing to come top. It didn't take long to figure it out, once we saw how the rest of the world was doing things. (Since then, early nineties, of course, we seem to have been following the rest of the world.)

Differences:

The vast majority of Australians for the most part had themselves paid for their Commercial Licences.

They were given their type ratings in-house.

Line training was extensive and thorough. (AN DC9 captain – 55 sectors; BA B747 captain – 6 sectors)

Line clearance checks were extensive and thorough. (AN DC9 – 15 sectors; BA capt – 1.)

Australia, 2 annual line checks, each 3 sectors, including night and instrument approaches. In the outside world, one annual line check, one sector, and conditions per chance. Very light, if any, questioning.

Simulator type training and recurrent training – about the same. The final system of four simulators a year at three month intervals was excellent.

The training and the "two goes" system worked. There were very few failures at command check-out. (High command failure rates are no indication of standards; you can have both high command failure rates and poor standards.)

The UK tech exams were about the same level of difficulty as Australia, but much given to trivia. The Americans tech exams were very light, but they had a system of oral exams for license and for type qualification which, in my experience anyway, were very, very thorough.

There was, back then, constant communication at all levels between the pilots, operators, ATC and the regulator. In the outside world such contact was rare.

Etc.

Generally,

I wouldn't change the minimum hours for CPL. For airline entry I think around 750 real in-flight aircraft hours would be sufficient. Varies with the individual and the operation. The proposed US 1500 hour idea should be watched closely. The Americans do a great deal of flying, and mostly they get it right.

I wouldn't touch the Multi Crew Licence idea with a barge-pole. That system is asking for serious trouble.

Cadetships and similar should be avoided. Flying is an occupation which requires a great deal of thought and effort. Cadetships make it easy, too easy.

Paying for type ratings prior to employment is okay. I've done it, it works.

Recruiting should be from the ex-military and GA pools. There are out there in the GA world right now large numbers of very keen, very capable individuals.

Retention of experience? Is this right a B717 captain gets 101K a year? What can you say! So much for Australian Industrial Law and the realities of life.

Regulation should be reduced to the absolute minimum. Safety in the air depends finally and totally on the human being, and can never be achieved by regulations.

Notwithstanding the last, flight crew must be protected absolutely from harm arising from incidents, accidents, whistle-blowing of any kind, except where there is criminal intent.

What experience have I got to comment on this subject? Not much, but the CV includes:

Air transport pilot 1964 – 2006.  
Half a dozen ATPL's including Australia, USA and UK.  
Line trainer / line checker B747 and gliders.  
Experienced in long haul, short haul, passenger, freight, scheduled and non-scheduled operations world-wide except arctic.

I have heard various operators complaining about shortage of available crew. Well, I wasted 2007 applying for work here in Australia, I got no-where. As mentioned above there is a large pool of excellent candidates out there in GA.

Thank you for your time.

Yours faithfully,

FA Walker.