

# A380 is big enough to host an Olympic event, but would you want your sister to marry (in) one?

If the cabin crew on a 737 can't get the passenger head count correct the first time, we're in deep trouble now...

"Ladies and gentlemen, we may be missing one of our 555 passengers, we'll count you again and let you know..."



THEY'VE finally done it, designed an aircraft that's big enough to host an Olympics triathlon. You could just about do it, too, by making the competitors run between the seats, cycle down the aisles and swim a couple of lengths of the downstairs pool (if there was one).

The new Airbus A380 is, however, destined for headier stuff than a four-yearly athletics meeting. It's designed for people like you and me who occasionally decide to travel long distances and who want to do it in an approximation of the same comfort afforded by the better cruise ships, upmarket touring coaches and five-star hotels. That is, we want bars, cinemas, good food, good company and the opportunity to stretch and exercise whenever we want.

And we want to do it faster, for longer distances and we don't mind doing it about five miles up in the air in a tin can with as many as 554 other people of a similar bent. I'll get back to these other people in a minute, but for the moment, please

let me give you a little of my view of the Airbus commercial. It's only a little bit scary.

Go visit their web site ([www.airbus.com](http://www.airbus.com)) and you'll see a lot of space is devoted to things that as a passenger, I don't need to be reminded of...such as the successful installation and testing of an innovative flight test tailbumper. I quote in full from just one over-detailed Airbus web page:

*"The tailbumper protects the fuselage and tail cone from damage due to contact with the ground during low-speed take-off tests (known as VMU tests) that an aircraft must complete as part of the stringent certification process. Though crucial to these certification tests, the tailbumper is generally unnecessary for in-service aircraft so is seldom incorporated into a completed aircraft destined for customer use.*

*'As the largest civilian aircraft, the A380 was unable to adopt*

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the traditional form of  
tailbumper system -  
essentially involving  
reinforcing the interior and exterior of  
the tail cone with steel beams - so an  
alternative solution had to be found.

*‘Over a period of three years, a team involving employees from 14 suppliers and six Airbus sites designed and manufactured a new flight test flight tailbumper for the A380 that is based around an hydraulic damper, which in essence is a sophisticated type of shock absorber.*

*‘The new tailbumper was installed on the aircraft for the first time at the A380 Final Assembly Line hall in Toulouse in mid-January. After installation it was systematically tested to ensure that it will protect the aircraft’s fuselage and tail cone easily throughout the rigorous VMU tests.*

*‘Immediately after this test phase was completed, the external elements of the tailbumper were removed prior to the unveiling of the A380 in Toulouse on the 18th of January. The aircraft’s cutting-edge flight test tailbumper system will be reinstalled on the aircraft prior to the certification tests that should commence some three months after its first flight.’*

Okay, thanks Airbus.

I know I said just one quote, but as a web surfer and Airbus A380 fan, you have multiple choices. Here’s a bit from the wing bending test page:

*‘The wing bending test was performed successfully up to limit load on the A380 static test aircraft on 2 February. (some author deletions here, then.)*

*‘The following day the wing was again subjected to limit wing bending. This loading condition was held for approximately 45 minutes whilst functioning tests of the spoilers and ailerons were carried out. The tests showed that the control surfaces moved in accordance with design intentions. The control surfaces were not loaded during these tests.’*

This is of course really important stuff. I really like the bit about testing

the wing for 45 minutes. Makes me feel really confident about flying it say, Sydney-Newcastle.

No, seriously, let’s get to the nub of this new aircraft and why I won’t be queuing up to fly in it.

First, the time it’ll take to board and disembark. Two things need to be said: One: It’ll probably be less time in total than the transit and board/disembark times on today’s one-stop long-haul flight stopping at Singapore, Bangkok or HK. Second: I accept that argument and in response to it I say: Bollocks!

Check-in is a nightmare today, just imagine what it’s going to be like with more than 500 others, many of them arriving hours early in the hope of being at, or close to, the head of the queue. Got excess baggage? Today you either shed a few pounds or pay a hefty penalty, but I have the feeling that

## Put 500 of you into a single aircraft and delay the departure and the rules that apply to crowd behaviour may have to be rewritten.

tolerance won’t be a big plus at the A380 check-in. Whatever choices you’re given, (the bottom line being either lose weight or pay up) they’ll be timed. Not by the staff, necessarily, more probably by some of the 500 tired, stressed, people behind you in that a very queue who develop short fuses.

Once airside, you’ll go through the whole exercise again at the gate. Bad enough today, but with four aisles and 555 passengers: Ding..”Will passengers seated in row 70, seats ‘a’ through ‘f’ kindly board the aircraft”...Ding..”Will passengers seated in row 69 seats ‘g’ through.....” Arghh.

You’ll queue to get on the plane. At the door of the aircraft, you’ll each need the equivalent of a cinema usher to direct you to your seat (four aisles, baby, you work it out).

If you’re lucky, the guy in seat 21F with the oversize cabin bag won’t board ahead of you and block the aisle as he tries to jam his gear into the overhead locker.

If you’re unlucky, he and the three guys in 19F, 17F and 15F will all be ahead of you and they’ll all have troublesome bags.

I think you get the picture.

Anyone seen the cabin crew do a passenger count on a 737 and get it right first time? Oh yes, they’ll be walking up and down the aisles with those little click jobs, getting RSI as they recount.

Delays. Passenger failed to board? Late connecting flights? Congestion on the runway? It’s damned annoying to be delayed even when it’s no-one’s fault and you’ve only got a couple of hundred companions all champing at the bit. Put 555 of you all in the same plane and it’s entirely possible that the rules that apply to crowd behaviour will have to be rewritten.

Getting off the plane will be just as awful (except for the relief). Hundreds of competing passengers all heading for as many open doors as they can find, but all subjected to the physical dimension limitations of the door and then the Customs queue and baggage carousel once they’re out.

In flight, on many routes, the bar will be busy and noisy. Cabin service will almost certainly be stressful for both passengers and crew, with call buttons pinging like Internet IP address tests.

Meal delivery and tray clearance times will be interesting, to say the least. Menus will be reworked to ensure that whatever is served can be cooked or heated in vast quantities and still be acceptably warm, tasty and nutritionally acceptable when delivered.

And I’ve left the worst till last. No, not the toilets (bad as that experience may be) and not the possibility that terrorists might decide an A380 makes a really attractive target.

No, the worst thing about the A380 may well be that the damn thing is so economically attractive, that the only airlines that don’t buy it are the ones we’re scared to fly on.

On the plus side, there’s always the exclusive business and first class cabins..shouldn’t be more than a few hundred seats in there.....