

Partners provide passengers aplenty for 'new' Lufthansa

ALTHOUGH the blue, white and gold livery no longer appears at Australia's two biggest airports, Germany's Lufthansa Airlines — through a code-share alliance with Singapore Airlines and Thai International Airways — has a stronger presence than ever and is reporting in record passenger numbers.

Aviation economics forced Lufthansa to withdraw its own services to Sydney and Melbourne and become what is known as an offline carrier in 1995.

Now, utilising its Star Alliance partner airlines Singapore and Thai, Lufthansa is able to offer 115 code-share flights a week from the key Australian mainland cities of Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Melbourne and Sydney.

Gabriela Ahrens, the airline's new general manager Australia said the initial decision to withdraw its own services from Sydney and Melbourne was very difficult. "After 30 years — we began flying to Sydney in 1965 — it was quite a wrench. Code-share flights (- they allow passengers to travel on flights operated by partner carriers, as well as the one shown on their airline ticket) had not been in for long," said Ahrens. "However, the signing of a new bilateral agreement between Australia and Germany in June 1998 resulted in significant changes in Lufthansa's connections to and from Australia," she said. "At Lufthansa, we had built up an enviable reputation for in-flight service and reliability and to ask our customers to fly another airline from Australia to



the key Asia hubs to join our flights seemed like a big ask at the time. But now, with the benefit of hindsight, it proved to be one of the best decisions. It has been very successful. We are fortunate in working with partner airlines that also set very high standards."

Today, Lufthansa offers a total of 149 flights from Asia-Pacific to Europe. The airline recently introduced a new non-stop flight between Frankfurt and Guangzhou; added a new route Frankfurt- Bangkok-Jakarta which replaced the Frankfurt-Singapore-Jakarta service; and changed Frankfurt-Bangkok-Manila to Frankfurt-Guangzhou-Manila. The airline also introduced its new business class. Costing more than euro300 million and claimed to have the longest bed in its class, it also offers a new seat concept, as well as a groundbreaking program of entertainment and information.

The new two-metre bed now makes a relaxing sleep possible in business class," said Ahrens. "The new seats are good for work, entertainment and relaxation, especially for our frequent flyers, thus creating the preconditions for stress-free travel."

The new seating is available on the airline's A340-600 and A330-300 aircraft. The entire long-haul fleet of around 80 aircraft will be progressively upgraded with the new product.

Meanwhile, the decision by the carrier to become the first airline to offer high-speed Internet access in-flight has

proved a big winner with passengers. First introduced on the busy Munich - Los Angeles route, the technology is now available on most long-haul flights from Europe to the US and Asia. According to a recent study, about 93 percent of around 625 users questioned are satisfied or very satisfied with the online service above the clouds.

The FlyNet Service consists of both a free portal with comprehensive news, travel information and shopping facilities, as well as Internet access. Via this access, passengers can surf the web, send and receive e-mails with attachments and access their company's own Intranet (Virtual Private Network) while on board. The connection is made with their own laptop computer without the need for a cable via Wireless LAN (WLAN).

"Business travellers, in particular, can make even more productive use of their flying time," said Ahrens. "They have, on the one hand, all the latest information and research facilities; at the same time, the full range of entertainment is also at their disposal."

It is proving very popular, said Ahrens, and had been confirmed by the survey in which 85 per cent of respondents said that the availability of high-speed Internet would have an influence on the choice of an airline in future."

Passengers can access information on current availability on the FlyNet information pages at www.lufthansa.com.