

Starting up

- Which famous passenger plane is nearing the end of its long career?
- Can you name some other successful or famous airliners?
- How do you see the future of the airline industry after the impact of Covid-19?

Reading

The Boeing 747 is nearing the end of its time in the skies. To find out more, read the article and then answer the questions that follow.

Reading comprehension

Read the article again and answer the questions below.

- 1 What is the Boeing 747 generally known as?
- 2 How long has it been flying?
- 3 Which airline had the most 747s in its fleet?
- 4 Which airlines have announced they will stop flying 747s?
- 5 What airliner did the 747 take over from?
- 6 How did the 747 compare with its predecessor?
- 7 What does the writer think of the 747?
- 8 Which plane has been the main competitor to the 747 in recent years?
- 9 How does the competitor compare with the 747?
- 10 How long has the A380 been flying?
- 11 What is the future for the A380?
- 12 What kind of passenger planes will be needed in the future?
- 13 How is flying viewed by many people these days?

The end of the jumbo jet era

The Queen of the Skies is approaching her abdication. British Airways has announced that its 31 Boeing 747-400s will never fly again. There are still more than 500 747s in service with other airlines. But BA was the 747's biggest operator. Its immediate retirement of its 747s marks the demise of the jumbo plane's 50-year reign.

BA's announcement follows similar decisions by airlines such as Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and Air France.

Michael Donne, the FT's first aviation correspondent, was present at the 747's beginning. Describing his maiden Pan American 747 flight in January 1970, he wrote that boarding the plane was "like entering a private theatre". Once in the air, the 747 showed its superiority over its Boeing predecessor. "The engine noise is lower than in 707 cabins, especially in the forward sections, and although still loud in the rear sections, is not enough to drown conversation, or make it painful, as in the rear section of the 707."

With the aircraft approaching its end, BA pilot Mark Vanhoenacker wrote in the FT in February of his final 747 flight from London to Cape Town in the plane he had loved since childhood for its "size, its unique shape, and above all for the wonder and sense of freedom that those three famous digits so effortlessly conjure up".

As a passenger, I am dry-eyed. I recognise the 747's huge technical achievements and its role in bringing long-haul travel to billions, but the plane has, for years now, felt old, tired and noisy. Any nostalgia I might have felt has been tarnished by the 747's long goodbye.

The huge plane that really moves me is the Airbus A380. Yes, the 747 is big, typically with around 400 seats; the A380 can carry more than 600. Entering the 747 may have felt like going to the theatre; stepping into the A380 is like boarding a cruise liner. I have flown on A380s with BA, Emirates and Qantas. I have sat in economy, premium economy and business. I have never failed to be enthralled.

The A380 is quiet beyond the imaginings of that early 747 crowd. Not only can you talk on the A380, you have to whisper if you don't want to be heard at the back. But the A380 is nearing the end of its run too. Just 13 years after the first A380 flight by Singapore Airlines, Airbus is ceasing production. The last A380 will be completed in the middle of next year.

Flying, as it slowly recovers after Covid-19, looks like being smaller, nimbler and point-to-point, rather than in huge aircraft collecting passengers at hub airports.

Aircraft romantics and plane lovers seem out of date too; flying, in this environmentally conscious age, has become grounds for criticism.



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Vocabulary 1

Choose the best match for the words in bold.

- 1 The Queen of the Skies is approaching her **abdication**.
 - a retirement
 - b destruction
- 2 ... his **maiden** ... 747 flight in January 1970 ...
 - a accompanied by his wife
 - b first
- 3 Once in the air, the 747 showed its **superiority** over its Boeing predecessor.
 - a how much bigger it was
 - b how much better it was
- 4 The engine noise is not enough to **drown** conversation ...
 - a make conversation impossible
 - b make conversation uninteresting
- 5 ... sense of freedom that those three famous digits so effortlessly **conjure up**.
 - a acts like magic
 - b brings ideas into your mind

Vocabulary 2

Match a word or phrase from the article in Column A with its definition in Column B.

- | Column A | Column B |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 dry-eyed | a affected (in a negative way) |
| 2 nostalgia | b reasons |
| 3 tarnished | c thrilled and impressed |
| 4 moves me | d not sad or emotional |
| 5 enthralled | e more flexible |
| 6 to whisper | f creates a strong feeling |
| 7 nimbler | g speak very quietly |
| 8 grounds | h feeling of pleasure but also sadness when thinking about the past |

Grammar – comparative and superlative adjectives

Complete these sentences with the comparative or superlative form of the adjective in brackets.

- 1 The 747 is one of _____ (old) commercial airliners still flying.
- 2 For many years, the 747 was _____ (big) airliner, but now the A380 is _____ (big).
- 3 The A380 is also much _____ (quiet) and _____ (comfortable) than the 747.
- 4 But the noise level in the cabin of the 747 was _____ (low) than in its predecessor, the Boeing 707.
- 5 The 747 is one of the ten _____ (successful) airliners ever built, from a commercial point of view.
- 6 Concorde was _____ (fast) airliner ever built.
- 7 The 747 was produced by Boeing for much _____ (long) than the A380 by Airbus.
- 8 The A380 is much _____ luxurious than the 747.
- 9 British Airways was _____ (big) operator of the 747.
- 10 Airliners of the future will be _____ (small) and _____ (nimble).

Discussion

- 1 If you have flown in the 747 and the A380, which one did you prefer and why? Or do you have another preferred airliner? Explain why.
- 2 Do you agree that the era of the super large airliner has gone forever?
- 3 Do you agree with the closing phrase of the article: *flying, in this environmentally conscious age, has become grounds for criticism?*

ANSWER KEY

Starting up

Most successful airliners in terms of sales:

(* still in production)

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Boeing 737* | 7 Boeing 747 |
| 2 Airbus A320* | 8 Boeing 787* 'Dreamliner' |
| 3 Boeing 717 | 9 Boeing 767 |
| 4 Airbus A300/A330/A340* | 10 Boeing 757 |
| 5 Boeing 777* | |
| 6 Boeing 727 | |

Don't forget about Concorde and the huge A380!

Reading comprehension

- The jumbo jet.
- 50 years.
- British Airways (BA).
- BA, Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and Air France.
- Boeing 707.
- It was far superior, especially in the air because it was much quieter inside the cabin. The plane gave a sense of wonder and achievement.
- He is less impressed because it has been showing its age for some years now. It is also noisy compared to the A380. But he recognises its technical achievements and its role in bringing long-haul travel to billions.
- Airbus A380.
- It is much bigger (600 passengers vs 400), like a cruise liner, very quiet in the cabin.
- 13 years.
- It is soon to stop production, although it may still keep flying for some years as many of the planes are almost brand new.
- Airliners in the future will need to be smaller and more flexible so they can fly direct between smaller airports rather than just big hubs.
- Air travel is seen in a negative light by more and more people due to its impact on climate change.

Vocabulary 1

- a
- b
- b
- a
- b

Vocabulary 2

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1 d | 5 c |
| 2 h | 6 g |
| 3 a | 7 e |
| 4 f | 8 b |

Grammar – comparative and superlative adjectives

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 the oldest | 6 the fastest |
| 2 the biggest ... the biggest | 7 longer |
| 3 quieter ... more comfortable | 8 more luxurious |
| 4 lower | 9 the biggest |
| 5 most successful | 10 smaller ... nimbler |

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