

Serious Injuries on a Qantas A330 Flight on 7 October 2008

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Oct 8, 2008 - A Qantas Airbus A330-300, with 303 passengers and 10 crew members on board, was on a scheduled international flight from Singapore to Perth. While in cruise, the aircraft reportedly experienced some type of sudden and unexpected altitude change. The crew issued a mayday call before diverting the aircraft to the airport at Learmonth, near the town of Exmouth, about 1100 kilometers or 680 miles north of its intended destination of Perth.

About 36 passengers and crew members were injured, with over a dozen severe injuries. Reportedly, several occupants were slammed into the ceiling during the event. Most of the injuries were to passengers and crew in the rear of the aircraft, and at least one person was carried off the plane in a stretcher. About 13 of the most seriously injured were flown to Perth by four aircraft from the Royal Flying Doctor Service. One flight attendant was hospitalized with suspected head and spinal injuries. Other serious injuries included fractures, lacerations, and a concussion.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau has a team of seven investigators currently working on this incident, and it will likely be several days before a preliminary cause is announced, and several months before a final report is issued.

This is the first significant passenger safety event for the A330. Qantas currently has 15 A330 aircraft in its fleet, including 10 of the A330-300 model.

This is the second significant safety event for Qantas this year. On July 25, an exploding oxygen bottle blew a hole in the fuselage of a Qantas 747 en route from Hong Kong to Melbourne, causing a rapid decompression and forcing an emergency landing in Manila. No passengers were injured in that event.

Other significant safety events for Qantas in the last decade include a 2000 event in Rome involving the collapse of a 747 landing gear, and in 1999 a landing overrun in Bangkok severely damaged another Qantas 747.

In August 2008, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority of Australia conducted a review of Qantas safety and found no system-wide safety issues, but did recommend an audit of the airline's maintenance practices, including a full maintenance audit of one aircraft from three of the models flown by Qantas, the 737-400, 747-400, and 767-300. No maintenance audit was ordered for the airline's A330 fleet.

Additional information about this event, including updates or findings from the investigation or from the Qantas maintenance audit, will be available at qantas.airsafe.org.

About AirSafe.com:

AirSafe.com is a comprehensive resource for understanding aviation safety and security issues and created to provide both the traveling public and aviation safety and security professionals with both objective and timely information on aviation safety and security, especially events involving airline passenger fatalities. Since 1996, AirSafe.com has been an innovator in making critical risk assessment and risk management information to the public, enabling both airline passengers and aviation professionals to make accurate judgments about the risks of flying. Whether it is through its web sites, audio podcasts, online discussions, or published research, AirSafe.com continues to be at the forefront of getting useful aviation safety and security information to the aerospace industry and to the general public.

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