
Jeremy's World: Back to the future

By **Jeremy Clark** on March, 13 2019 | Jeremy's World



Nostalgia is a powerful marketing tool, especially for today's airlines

You must have noticed in recent years that many airlines are looking back to their roots and repainting aircraft with “retro” liveries. We see the occasional TWA in [American](#)'s line-up, together with a 737 in its [1960s Astrojet colors](#). [El Al](#), [Lufthansa](#), [KLM](#) and [Aer Lingus](#) are sporting some old-fashioned glamour, and now [British Airways](#) is reminding us of British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), British European Airways (BEA) and earlier versions of its liveries as it celebrates an alleged 100th birthday (although it's really 45). There are a couple of airlines who will probably wait a while before revisiting earlier versions of themselves – I am thinking particularly of my own alma mater, Swissair. The wounds are still too raw!

But what's the business sense in any of this? It's not cheap to paint a plane, and apart from the plane-spotters who sit at the end of a runway waiting for one to appear, who cares?

Well, apparently, we do. Judging from the frenetic Twittering and Instagramming when these liveries appear, people love it. I've heard the BOAC 747 is being tracked by punters who are buying tickets to fly wherever it's going, regardless of whether or not they want to go, just to be on it – and given you can't see the outside from the inside, I wonder why.

It points to something more interesting, and that is recognition of brand equity.

Retro planes are something [easyJet](#), [Southwest](#) and [AirAsia](#) can't do; they're still on their first go-around. As airlines come and go – and we have seen a few disappear just recently – the hankering for a reminder of how good it all once was has business value.

How much of this exploration into the past makes it into the future is debatable. There is no question that passengers relish the memories of service levels we enjoyed when these colors were flying. And for those too young to have experienced it, it's like going to living museum.

On a more factual and serious note, something I have advocated for all my working life are the memories that good food and service induce, thus producing an opinion on the brand. It cannot be underestimated, nor can it be easily quantified, which is why most airlines run by bean counters or ex-LCC operators fail to see the long-term investment value.

This is brand equity that can and should be exploited. The likes of [Qatar](#) and [Emirates](#) have to earn it. The likes of BA and [Air France](#) had it but lost it, and this is a chance to get it back.

I get tired of reading tweets from disgruntled LCC passengers whining about the lousy service and rotten food. It's their own fault. In the race to get the cheapest fare, you have to make sacrifices.

However, it looks like this trend can be reversed if the retro jet painting exercise is anything to go by. In the same way you can sell a Ralph Lauren Polo shirt for 20 times the price of one of a not-too-dissimilar quality from Walmart, so too can you invest a little more in the cabin, brand it all up nicely to evoke "the good old days," and charge more.

Maybe it's time to not just get out the old cans of paint but to break out those old menus and crockery and sell the memory of just how good it once was.