

Thompson reimagines First Class with enhanced front rows in Business cabin

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Thompson's VantageXL+ First has been designed for the wider A350 and 787 aircraft

The traditional First Class cabin, designed to offer a hotel-like experience in the sky, is not always a feasible use of space for airlines. As more passengers demand a premium cabin experience, [Thompson Aero Seating's](#) (TAS) VantageXL+ First seat offers a way to deliver that elevated experience without investing in a dedicated First Class cabin onboard. Instead, balancing the commercial demands of the Business Class product while integrating aspects of a First Class experience is a way to marry economic benefit and luxury for airline and traveler.

As Jonny McGreevy, Chief Technical Officer, Thompson Aero Seating, tells *PAX Tech*, "The triumph of Thompson Aero Seating's enhanced front rows is that they enable airlines to offer a First Class experience within the same LOPA as an all-Business-Class cabin."



Jonny McGreevy, Chief Technical Officer, Thompson Aero Seating

This option has been coined “First Class for free” and offers airlines an opportunity to sell select Business Class seats to passengers at a premium, elevating the travel experience at a fraction of the cost to the carrier.

“It is achieved by TAS with clever usage of the available cabin space and there is, therefore, no loss of density,” explains McGreevy.

TAS’s VantageXL, VantageSOLO and VantageNOVA all offer the opportunity for an enhanced front row, and now, the VantageXL+ First joins the lineup.

Blending First and Business

TAS unveiled the VantageXL+ First at the [Aircraft Interiors Expo 2026](#) in April, showcasing the various features of this latest seat iteration that bring some typical First Class luxuries into the Business Class cabin. VantageXL+ First features extended bed-level cushioning, resulting in a comfortable resting and sleeping position.

At a 40-inch seat pitch, the bed length is 79 inches and at a 44-inch pitch, the VantageXL+ First beds₂

in lie-flat position are 82.4 inches in length. There is a floating outboard armrest and a cocktail surface, as well as a customizable console area and various stowage options. The VantageXL+ First also has the option for a zero-g seating position. As well, an enhanced seat height “halo” (extended-height front panel) delivers increased passenger privacy.



VantageXL+ First enables dual and quad socializing and dining

“All of this together makes for a heightened flight experience,” says McGreevy.

The VantageXL+ First has been designed specifically for the wider A350 and 787 aircraft. The enhancements provide more room across the passenger’s shoulders and hips. The second-generation buddy seat is also wider, with a simple deployment mechanism and wrap-around cushion.

McGreevy explains that storage has been brought closer to the passenger for easier access and the suites accommodate up to 32-inch monitors.

“The suite has been restyled with softer forms and greater use of textiles to give an extremely comfortable look and feel,” he says. “The enhanced front row achieves the absolute maximum from the cabin space, which is then given back to the passenger in terms of additional comfort and luxury.”

As with all of TAS’s enhanced front rows, the VantageXL+ First enables dual and quad socializing and dining. McGreevy highlights that this is not normally found in Business Class suites.

“This is made possible by the buddy seats in each front row suite, dropping dividers and a clever mechanism to connect the tables. The dual and quad socializing and dining capability gives airlines a powerful opportunity to create a distinctive premium offering and further differentiate their onboard experience,” he says.

As for whether the line between First Class and Business Class is still clearly defined, McGreevy says there are many commercial reasons why enhanced Business Class seating may be a preferable move for airlines over offering a traditional First Class cabin.

“Depending on the customization selected and the service offered, this can pretty much be First Class, if that is what the airline wants. There is still a place for First Class cabins, but the enhanced front rows we offer give airlines total flexibility and choice,” he says.

The delivery is in the details

By reimagining the front row of the cabin, TAS is giving airlines the opportunity to reconcile commercial priorities with premium passenger expectations, delivering a standout experience for select travelers without impacting the rest of the Business Class cabin.

The design minimizes the traditional trade-off between exclusivity and cabin efficiency by integrating the enhanced suites into the existing Business Class footprint,” McGreevy explains.

He notes that the suites can be customized to match the rest of the Business Class cabin, or with alternative CMF to further differentiate them as an elevated offering. And, as he tells *PAX Tech*, it is often these minute details that give the passenger environment a premium feel.



The VantageXL+ First in the Edelweiss Business Suite on A350

“It is the extra few inches here and there that make a really big difference to passenger comfort,” he explains. “Clever curves and sculpting enable TAS to give space back to the passenger in the VantageXL+ First and reprofiled forward corners allow the seat to sit further forward in the cabin, giving greater privacy.”

According to McGreevy, the industry response to the VantageXL+ First has been extremely positive, with [Edelweiss](#) becoming the first European carrier to announce that it will be bringing the suites onboard. The enhanced front row will be marketed as the “Edelweiss Business Suite” and the carrier has selected closable doors and large 32-inch monitors for a full cinematic experience. Delivery is scheduled for later this year.