

Cathay says 15 Airbus planes need new engine parts after fleet-wide inspections

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Cathay is conducting fleet-wide inspection of its 48 Airbus A350 aircraft.

Hong Kong carrier Cathay Pacific said Tuesday that 15 of its Airbus A350 jets needed new engine parts after inspecting its entire fleet, which was grounded following a "first of its type" engine component failure.

Cathay, one of the largest operators worldwide of the A350 jet, had grounded its 48-plane fleet of the aircraft and cancelled dozens of flights after a Zurich-bound plane was forced to turn back to Hong Kong on Monday.

The company said it had identified "an engine component failure", though it did not say which one.

"This component was the first of its type to suffer such failure on any A350 aircraft worldwide," the airline said.

By Tuesday afternoon, Cathay said its engineering team had identified 15 aircraft with affected engine parts and successfully repaired three.

"The remaining aircraft will continue to be out of service until they have been repaired and cleared for operation."

All the affected aircraft are expected to resume operations by Saturday, Cathay said.

'Impacts passengers'

Cathay cancelled 24 return flights on Tuesday, including to Singapore, Bangkok, Tokyo, Taipei and Osaka.

It said it will axe another 10 on Wednesday.

Shukor Yusof, an analyst with Singapore-based consultancy Endau Analytics, said the grounding will likely affect Cathay's bottom line.

"Anytime aircraft are grounded on a big scale is critical as it impacts passengers and ultimately the bottom line," he told AFP, adding that it remained to be seen if other carriers with large A350 fleets—like

Singapore Airlines or Japan Airlines—were affected.

"There are chronic logistical problems involving supply chain and manpower arising from COVID that are now coming home to roost."

A Singapore Airlines spokesperson later told AFP it was inspecting the Rolls-Royce Trent XWB-84 engines that power its Airbus A350-900 fleet as "a precautionary measure", and there was "currently no impact" on its flights using that aircraft.

Cathay announced last month that it planned to buy up to 60 Airbus A330-900 jetliners, which would add to its fleet of more than 230 aircraft.

It also said it was "on track to reach 100 percent" of its pre-pandemic passenger levels in the first quarter of next year, having earlier struggled to overcome a manpower crunch.

Rolls-Royce engines

British engine manufacturer Rolls-Royce confirmed Tuesday that the A350 aircraft operated by Cathay are "powered by Rolls-Royce Trent XWB-97 engines".

The company "is committed to working closely with the airline, [aircraft manufacturer](#) and the relevant authorities to support their efforts", it said, adding that an ongoing investigation into the incident "restricts Rolls-Royce from commenting".

"Rolls-Royce will also keep other airlines that operate Trent XWB-97 engines fully informed of any relevant developments as appropriate," it said.

Rolls-Royce shares traded down 6.47 percent in London on Monday, but recovered Tuesday following Cathay's inspections, rising above 4 percent in morning trade by around 9:30 am London time (0830 GMT).

The engine manufacturer said this year that it was investing more than £1 billion (\$1.3 billion) to upgrade its lineup of commercial aircraft engines.

Last November, Emirates chief executive Tim Clark expressed concerns about the durability and longevity of A350 engines.

Rolls-Royce has defended its Trent XWB-97 engines and said it was taking steps to improve their durability.

Airbus also said it was "working closely with Rolls-Royce and Cathay Pacific".

"At this time it would be inappropriate for us to comment further, pending the ongoing investigation," it told AFP.

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