

Cathay flights to resume fully by Saturday after A350 repairs

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Cathay Pacific expects to resume full operations by Saturday after replacing defective components on its A350s.

Cathay Pacific plans to resume full operations by Saturday after replacing defective engine fuel lines on its Airbus A350 planes, the airline said Wednesday, a problem that forced it to cancel dozens of flights this week.

Hong Kong-based Cathay, one of the largest operators of the A350 jetliner, grounded 48 planes for checks on Monday after a Zurich-bound flight had to return to the city shortly after take-off.

The inspection found that components on 15 of the A350s, powered by engines from the British manufacturer Rolls-Royce, had to be replaced.

"Fifteen aircraft were identified with engine fuel lines that require replacement. Of these, six have already undergone successful repairs and are cleared to operate," Cathay said in a statement.

"The remaining nine aircraft will be repaired and are expected to resume operation by Saturday."

When Cathay initially raised the alarm Monday, it said "the component was the first of its type to suffer such failure on any A350 aircraft worldwide".

The incident prompted other airlines in the region to carry out similar checks on their A350-900 and A350-1000 models, which are powered by Rolls-Royce Trent XWB-84 and XWB-97 engines, respectively.

Cathay has so far cancelled 90 flights between Monday to Saturday, mainly regional routes including connections to Singapore, Taipei, Tokyo and Bangkok.

Aboard a Cathay A350-900 plane to San Francisco on Wednesday, a Hong Kong passenger surnamed Yuen told AFP that he was "worried but I don't know who I can ask whether this aircraft has been checked".

"I would feel better if Cathay could send us a message saying the plane has been checked but they never did that," Yuen texted from the runway.

Japan Airlines confirmed that three of their A350 jets turned up no issues, while two more were undergoing inspections Wednesday.

A Thai Airways spokesperson said Wednesday the airline was using their A350 planes as normal, while Singapore Airlines said they had carried out checks and there was "no impact" on flights operating with their A350-900 fleet.

In Europe, Air France—which uses A350-900 models—said it was in contact with Airbus and Rolls-Royce.

Both firms "have not advised or mandated airlines to perform any checks", it said.



A Cathay Pacific staff is seen at the international airport in Hong Kong.

French firm Dubreuil, owner of the Air Caraibes and French Bee airlines that mainly operate A350s, including five A350-1000 long-haul aircraft, said that "to date, no return or action has been required on the aircraft in service with the airlines", which have noted "no engine incident of this type".

In the Middle East, Qatar Airways said "there has been no impact on the operation of any Qatar Airways Airbus A350-1000s", adding that it was monitoring the situation.

With 24 aircraft in its fleet, the Gulf state carrier is the world's largest operator of the A350-1000 model—the same type of aircraft Cathay had to return en route to Zurich.

'Critical' for fuel flow

Airbus and Rolls-Royce have said they are cooperating with Cathay, but could not comment further pending the investigation.

Hong Kong's Civil Aviation Department said Wednesday that it had contacted the EU Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and other relevant aviation authorities about the case.

EASA has not publicly released any specific information on the engines powering the A350, and did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

Terence Fan, an aviation expert at Singapore Management University, said defective engine lines could affect fuel flow, which is "urgent and

of critical importance".

"This seems to be a mechanical issue... one would definitely not want the same to be found in two out of two engines on the same aircraft mid-air," he told AFP.

Fan said a mechanical problem could be fixed quickly by replacing parts, though he called it "a bad sign" the issue had hit one-third of Cathay's A350 fleet.

The A350 is often deployed in long-haul flights that traverse oceans and sparsely populated areas with few airports to divert to if there are issues.

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

Qatar Airways also had a long-running dispute with Airbus over its jets, which was resolved in 2023.

Qatar grounded the jets in 2021 after paint started peeling on the exterior of some of its A350 planes. Its regulator said there could be a threat to the jet's lightning protection.

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

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