

Fleet Analysis: Airbus A340 fleet in 2022

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The Airbus A340 has been out of production for about a decade now. But the four-engined type continues to operate commercial service.

Despite Airbus joining the “very large aircraft” market a little too late, the planemaker managed to secure orders for a few hundred A340s during its production run. With deliveries beginning in 1993 and ending in 2012, this year marks 10 years since the last pair of A340s were sold off and delivered to a customer. Nearly 80 Airbus A340s still listed as active at the time of writing this article.

Unfortunate timing

The Airbus A340 is largely a story of bad timing. Designed and built to compete against the Boeing 747, this four-engined single-deck aircraft was just a decade or so too late due to advancements in engine power and reliability allowing for two-engined jets. Evolving regulations known as ETOPS allowed twin-engine aircraft to fly routes once exclusive to quad-jets. Thus, the Boeing 777 took a lot of market share from the A340 as it offered a competitive range and capacity with better economics.

According to Planespotters.net, there are 79 A340s listed as active with another 35 or so quad-jets listed as parked and another 87 or so listed as stored. Given the status of this aircraft type as old and inefficient, it’s questionable if the jets listed stored will indeed ever return to service again. While perhaps a handful of stored Lufthansa A340-600s maybe eventually be re-activated, it’s unlikely that the three SAS A340-300s will ever fly out of their current home at the Marana storage site in Arizona. Those listed as parked have a much better chance of flying again, but there is always the possibility that these will eventually have their status changed to stored.

The A340 ended production in 2011. Over the duration of the program, a total of 380 A340 family aircraft were delivered, 377 delivered to airlines. By the end of 2021, the global A340 fleet had completed more than 2.5 million flights over 20 million block hours and carried over 600 million passengers with no fatalities. The A350 is its successor; the McDonnell Douglas MD-11 and the Boeing 777 were its main competitors. The largest scheduled airline operators were:

- Lufthansa 22

- Mahan Air 11
- South African Airways 1
- Swiss International Air Lines 5
- other airlines, governments, charter and private operators with fewer aircraft of the type.

Azal Azerbaijan Airlines is one example of an airline that has been on the fence with the fate of its A340s. While it does have a single A340-600 actively flying VIP government services at the moment, the carrier was set to end A340-500 operations in mid-2021. However, it brought these back later in the year. While the pair of aircraft are parked at the moment, with no passenger services scheduled for the remainder of 2022, there's always the possibility that Azerbaijan Airlines brings one or both of the aircraft back as unplanned substitutions. The majority of owners who have decided to park or store their quad jets.

Active Commercial Passenger Operations

Lufthansa is one of the largest operators of the Airbus A340 these days. German carrier Lufthansa has the largest active fleet of A340s with 22. These break down to 17 A340-300s and five A340-600s. Another eight quadjets are parked and are also a mix of -300s and -600s. In early March, the airline welcomed the Airbus -600 back to active operations. The plan is for a total of five -600s to gradually return to service, providing additional capacity for the airline over the coming months. Sent to storage at the start of the pandemic, the -600s were brought back to service to offer more first class seats – a cabin which is absent in some of its other long-haul fleet.

Lufthansa's temporary move will come to an end when the airline takes delivery of A350-900s equipped with a first-class cabin. The first of these is due to be delivered in July 2023. Lufthansa plans to operate a one-in-one-out policy, meaning that each time an Airbus A350-900 with first class arrives, an A340-600 will be retired. Commenting on the re-activation in late 2021, an airline spokesperson said that five -600s would be reactivated for the summer flight schedule for Munich.

Swiss International Airlines

Meanwhile, fellow Lufthansa Group carrier Swiss International Airlines, has five active A340-300s. At the same time, another Lufthansa Group member, leisure-focused carrier Edelweiss Air, is actively operating four A340-300s.

Plus Ultra

Spanish long-haul airline Plus Ultra has two A340-300s and one -600. Out of their hub in Madrid, the -300s fly fairly regularly to Lima and Caracas while the -600 had been mostly operating between Madrid and Chengdu in recent months.

Aseman Airlines & Mahan Air

Outside of Europe, Iran seems to be the second-best place to get a ride on the A340. The country's Mahan Air is listed as having 11 active A340s, a mix of A340-300s and -600s. Another Iranian airline, Iran Aseman Airlines, has a single A340-300 in service, flying regularly between Tehran and Istanbul.

Kam Air & Syrian Air

Next door in Afghanistan, Kam Air operates three A340-300s. These fly regular services out of Kabul to cities like Dubai in the UAE and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Syrian Air's one active A340-300, registered YK-AZA, operates routine service from Damascus to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Cairo.

Conviasa

Over in South America, Venezuela's Conviasa apparently has four active A340s: One -200, one -300, and two -600s. Bucking the trend of A340 retirements, Conviasa received its A340-600 in late March. Registered YV3533, this jet is the first of three it will get in 2022. Indeed, the airline will take delivery of another Airbus A340-600 and an A340-500 in the next months!

Azman Air & South African Airways

And finally, in Africa, we have two operators. First there's Nigeria's Azman Air, which has a single ex-Virgin Atlantic A340-600, registered 5N-AAM. This operates between the Nigerian city of Kano to Jeddah and is fitted with an incredibly unique and possibly awkward pair of business class seats situated in front of 411 economy seats.

Down south, South African Airways has a single -300 which it flies regularly between Johannesburg and Lagos. The aircraft, registered ZS-SXF, occasionally flies out of Cape Town as well and periodically serves the Ghanaian capital of Accra.

Government and Wet-Lease Operations

The remaining active A340s mostly fall in to two categories: VIP government transports, or wet-lease services. When it comes to governments using the A340 as presidential or VIP transports, we have the previously mentioned Azerbaijan, but also several governments in the Middle East. These include Qatar, Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, and Turkey. In North Africa, the government of Algeria has an A340-500 while the Kingdom of Eswatini has a single -300. The Royal Thai Air Force has an active -500 while the German Air Force also operates a pair of A340-300s.

The Government of Egypt might be one operator that could soon retire its single A340-200. That's because it has acquired a Lufthansa-ordered Boeing 747-8i, which is now registered SU-EGY. The aircraft had previously been sitting in storage in the Californian desert until it found its new owner. At present, the double-decker is in Hamburg, likely at Lufthansa Technik getting its new VIP interior installed.

Lufthansa Technik highlights that its services offer more than just creating a beautiful cabin. The firm states the following about its VIP cabin services:

"We are able to conceptualize interiors for all international styles, always employing the finest luxury components and materials. From clean government style to rich baroque or cool Asian – our team of designers and engineers is ready to show endless possibilities."

Sounds like a big step up from a 28-year-old A340-200, even if the never-used 747-8 is now over 11

years of age.

And for leases, there's one notable arrangement this summer. Air Senegal will be increasing its service from Dakar to Paris on certain weeks between June and September. The airline has been wet leasing 9H-ZMK, a 17-year-old A340-300 which comes from Malta's Airhub Aviation. It will eventually change this to a different A340-300, one operated by Hi Fly Malta registered 9H-SZN.

Azerbaijan Airlines still operates an A340 for government purposes.

From the looks of it, the Airbus A340 may be out of production but it is far from extinction. However, unless you're a head of state or other government VIP, there aren't too many places you'll be able to step onboard one of these aircraft. Depending on your nationality, those from the western world will find their best chances with Lufthansa, Swiss, or Edelweiss. On the other hand, those in the Middle East certainly have a few options with quite a few airlines as well.

It's quite interesting to observe that there are more A340 operators out there than those flying Airbus' other quadjet, the A380. If sanctions against certain countries persist, perhaps it's possible that the A340 will outlive the A380 in terms of active commercial service. The A380, after all, is much more costly to operate and isn't able to access as many airports as its older but smaller sibling... we'll just have to wait 20 more years to see how the numbers change. simpleflying.com & AirGuideBusiness

