

# Southwest Airlines boosted on-time arrivals in January

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Southwest Airlines charged to the front of the pack in the January on-time arrivals derby, according to data released by airport and airline data provider OAG.

Southwest Airlines, which has its largest hub at Chicago's Midway Airport, finished a month in the dead of winter with 80.9 percent of flights arriving on time, besting perennial frontrunner Delta Air Lines, which came in second with 80.4 percent of flights arriving on time.

The United States Department of Transportation considers a flight to have arrived on time if it reaches the gate within 14 minutes of its scheduled arrival time.

Southwest's victory over Delta Air Lines no doubt will surprise many observers who closely monitor the four largest domestic carriers' on-time arrival performance. But Southwest did it after lagging in on-time performance for much of 2017 — an issue the carrier attributed to more crowded planes and bad weather, among other things.

Southwest's January numbers certainly suggest the carrier may have found a way to handle these issues. Interestingly, the carrier's on-time results in January come as Southwest announced the appointment of a new vice-president of operations, a position that had been vacant for a while, according to a Southwest spokeswoman.

Southwest's January on-time results also come in the wake of something I saw on a Southwest flight departing from Chicago's Midway Airport last week that I had never before witnessed in many years of traveling on Southwest flights.

When all overhead bin space was filled to capacity before all passengers had boarded a flight to Nashville, two customer service agents and the pilot quickly materialized on the jetway to proactively start checking bags of those customers still waiting to board the plane. It was some quick thinking (and action) that probably helped the plane be able to push back closer to its scheduled departure time.

Meanwhile, United Airlines, which remains laser-focused on on-time performance, wound up overall in third place behind Southwest and Delta with 78.7 percent of flights arriving on time.

Still, despite its regional service underperforming, United could claim an on-time arrival victory in January for

its mainline operations, which represent about half of the carrier's daily flights. Per United's internal tracking, 84 percent of the carrier's mainline flights arrived on-time, compared to 83.6 percent of Delta's and 82.4 percent of American's mainline flights.

As for American Airlines' (NASDAQ: AAL) overall on-time arrival performance, it finished last in on-time performance among the big four with 78.1 percent of flights arriving on time. As with United, AA's regional service dragged down the carrier's overall on-time arrival performance.

On the flight cancellation front in January, American also had the worst performance, with 3.6 percent of flights cancelled. United cancelled 3 percent of its flights for the month, and Delta cancelled 2.9 percent. Southwest also had the fewest cancelled flights at 2.1 percent.

