



The First T.A.A. Airbus A300B4 - VH-TAA

Robert N. Smith

**History Of The First
Trans Australia Airlines
Airbus A300B4-203
VH-TAA.**

Robert N. Smith

Foreword

When Trans-Australia Airlines announced its order for four wide bodied Airbus A300 aircraft on 10 December 1979 (it subsequently ordered a fifth example), many observers of the Australian airline scene were surprised. Orders for jet airliners in Australian service had hitherto gone exclusively to the Boeing or Douglas factory in the United States. Ansett Airlines, which ordered the wide bodied Boeing 767, wasted little time in counter advertising, urging its customers to fly in a Boeing not a 'Bus'.

The first of TAA's Airbus aircraft was registered VH-TAA (the others following in this bloc through to VH-TAE), arrived in Melbourne on 13 July 1981, entering scheduled service on 22 July. This was the second aircraft to carry this registration, the first being a TAA Douglas DC-4 which crashed on Bulwer Island whilst on approach to land at Brisbane Airport on 24 May 1961.

The TAA Airbus fleet entered service at a time when the airline passenger market was depressed, so for a time VH-TAA and its sister aircraft gave the airline an uneconomic over-capacity. This was remedied by the airline organising a short-term lease to the German airline Condor for its first two aircraft. When VH-TAA returned from Germany it was immediately leased to Air Niugini for a number of years, again to alleviate the over capacity problem.

However as Australia's economic conditions improved the greater capacity of the A300 fleet led by VH-TAA was more appropriate.

Initially painted in Trans Australia colours, VH-TAA was subsequently repainted in the outstanding Australian livery when the airline changed its name. Later, Australian was merged with Qantas and its fleet appeared in that airline's colours.

Passenger numbers never really improved to justify the continuous operation of five A300 aircraft, and as a result the second aircraft VH-TAB was sold to the Japanese airline TOA Domestic in 1987. There were other leases from the A300 fleet as well.

This book outlines in words and pictures the history of VH-TAA. It was the first wide-body jet in Australian domestic service and is an aircraft which hitherto has not received the recognition it deserves. I am happy to commend Robert Smith's work to the general reader and the specialist alike.

Dr E. D. Daw Canberra November 2010.

Airbus A300 - Background Information

When the prototype Airbus A300 F-WUAB took to the air for the first time on October 28, 1972 the hopes and aspirations of the fledgling Airbus Industrie rested on it achieving a satisfactory foothold in the jet airliner market. At that point in time the market was predominantly the domain of Boeing, Douglas and to a lesser extent Lockheed - all very successful American based aircraft manufacturers.

Airbus Industrie had only been formally established on December 18, 1970. It had been formed as a result of an initiative between the French, German and British Governments that originated in 1967. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the three governments on July 25, 1967 to fund a large capacity, twin-engined short to medium range passenger jet airliner that would compete against the 'Big Three' American conglomerates.

The research, development and manufacturing costs of this project were large and with no guarantee of commercial success both the French and British Governments expressed doubts as to its viability. As the MoU stated that 75 orders had to have been placed for the project by July 31, 1968 its future looked bleak.

Another factor impacting on the success of the project was the British Government's original stipulation that the aircraft had to be powered by the new Rolls Royce RB-207 engine, but this engine was too powerful and expensive for the proposed airliner. The only way to keep the seat-mile costs as low as possible was to increase the seating capacity to over 300 passengers, which the airlines did not want.

Rolls Royce had decided to abandon the RB-207 engine in order to concentrate on developing the smaller RB-211 powerplant for the Lockheed Tristar. This fact and the general lack of interest displayed by airlines towards the A300 resulted in the British Government announcing its withdrawal from the project on April 10, 1969. Hawker Sidderley continued to be an official subcontractor and was responsible for the design and construction of its wings.

The A300 was a very innovative airliner. It introduced the first application of composite materials on secondary and later primary aircraft structures. It also introduced electrical signalling (fly-by-wire) technology to secondary control surfaces, and the use of fuel transfers to control centre-of-gravity movements. It was the first airliner to use wingtip fences for better aerodynamics by reducing wingtip vortices.

In later versions it was the first twin-isle wide body jet airliner to be operated by a two-man crew only with the flight engineer's position being totally automated. Its cockpit featured glass instrumentation - 6 cathode ray tube (CRT) displays which replaced the traditional dial-type instruments. These electronic instruments provided flight, navigational and systems monitoring information in a clear and comprehensive manner.

With a 5.64 metre (222 inch) diameter circular fuselage it had 8 abreast seating thus allowing all passengers to be only 1 seat away from an aisle. Below the cabin floor it was able to accommodate two LD3 cargo containers side-by-side allowing their seamless interlining with most other wide-bodied jets.

Airbus Industrie established the final assembly line for the A300 at Toulouse-Blagnac Airport. Complete aircraft sections were built by the consortium's subcontractors all over Europe and then transported to Toulouse to be added to the production line as required. The larger sections were airlifted to Toulouse using a fleet of converted Boeing 377 Super Guppy aircraft.

Two prototypes were built, designated A300B1s. They were powered by General Electric CF6-50A engines and had a maximum weight of 132,000 kg. The first aircraft flew for the first time on October 28, 1972 with the second aircraft, registered as F-WUAC on February 5, 1973. The second airframe was subsequently refurbished and leased to TEA Trans European Airlines for regular passenger operations once its development flying had been completed.

The first production version was designated A300B2. They were powered by either the General Electric CF6 or the Pratt & Whitney JT9D engines. This prototype flew for the first time as F-WUAD on June 28, 1973. It received certification from both the French and German authorities on March 15, 1974 with FAA approval being received on May 30, 1974. The first production aircraft c/n 005 flew for the first time as F-WVGA on April 15, 1974. It was handed over to Air France on May 10 and had the honour of being the first A300 to fly commercially when it operated the Paris-London service on May 23, 1974. Only 59 A300B2s were built.

One of the noted A300 early drawbacks was its limited range of some 2,970 km. This was quickly recognised by Airbus Industrie and an upgraded version, the A300B4, was developed. This version was heavier and became the standard production model until it was replaced by the A300B4-600 in 1983.

The A300B4 had a centre-section fuel tank added that increased its fuel capacity to 47,500 kg giving it a range of 4,825 km. It was also offered to customers in a convertible passenger / freighter version with a large cargo door on the port side as well as a full freighter version. The first A300B4 to fly was in fact the ninth aircraft built and flew for the first time on December 25, 1974. It received its certification on March 26, 1975 and was delivered to Germanair on May 23, 1975.

Despite the A300 being an advanced airliner it still lacked a successful sales record. At one stage Airbus Industrie had upto 16 'white-tails' parked at its facilities.

In 1977 Eastern Airlines leased four A300s for trial on its routes. When these aircraft were compared to the Lockheed Tristars then in operation, the A300s delivered a 30% fuel saving. This resulted in Eastern Airlines buying 23 of the type allowing Airbus Industrie to establish a vital foothold in the North American market.

Also in 1977 the A300B4 became the first ETOPS compliant aircraft. Due to its high performance and safety standards it qualified for the Extended Twin Engine Operations over water that enabled airlines to be more versatile in their route planning. This success spurred Boeing to develop a similar ETOPS version of their new Boeing 767 airliner.

Airbus built a total of 248 A300B2 and B4 airframes, of which five were purchased new by Trans-Australia Airlines. In March 2006 Airbus Industrie announced the closure of the A300 production line. The final A300 airframe, an A300-600RF freighter, made its first flight on April 18, 2007 and was delivered to Fedex on July 12, 2007. Despite the A300 being the first Airbus Industrie product to be discontinued, they have put in place support packages to ensure that this airliner can continue commercial operations until at least 2025.

Trans-Australia Airlines (TAA) first alluded to the prospect of purchasing wide-body jet airliners in its 1969 / 1970 Annual Report. With the Airbus product still very much a 'paper' project, the Lockheed Tristar and the Douglas DC-10 were mentioned. Things really started to get serious when the Airbus A300B1 prototype now reregistered as F-OCAZ arrived in Australia on May 13, 1974 during its world demonstration tour. It flew Darwin-Sydney-Melbourne allowing various airline representatives to inspect it.

On May 18 Air New Zealand flew their Douglas DC-10 ZK-NZN to Melbourne for inspection by TAA. Not to be outdone Lockheed chartered the All Nippon Tristar JA-8506 prior to its delivery and flew it to Brisbane on May 21. It then flew demonstration flights to Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney before departing to Japan.

Moving to a wide-body jet was a major technological step up for the airline, especially when it is remembered that it was currently operating Boeing 727 and Douglas DC-9 airliners. A lot hinged on successfully predicting market trends and catering for them through the deployment of the right-sized aircraft to accommodate the travelling public.

On December 10, 1979 the then Chairman of Australian National Airlines Commission Sir Richard R. Law-Smith and the Regional Sales Manager for Airbus Industrie Mr Hugh Tansley, signed an order for the purchase of four Airbus A300B4s for TAA with options on another two airframes. The delivery dates required the first two aircraft to be delivered in October 1981, with the third aircraft delivered in May 1982 and the last in June 1983. As a result of a downturn in economic conditions only one additional airframe was purchased which was delivered in December 1983 despite having flown for the first time in October 1982.

Originally the A300B4s were deployed on the Melbourne-Sydney-Brisbane route configured to seat 269 passengers. During the difficult economic times of the early 1980s these aircraft were sometimes only carrying 60 passengers per sector - hardly a viable commercial situation.

Despite the very difficult early years the Airbus A300B4s settled down to become dependable 'work horses' for Trans-Australia Airlines and later for Qantas when it acquired the re-named Australian Airlines in September 1992.

Prior to the sale of Australian Airlines to Qantas one A300B4 VH-TAB had been sold to Japan's TOA Domestic Airlines in 1987. This aircraft continues to be operated in a passenger configuration by Iran Air in 2010.

The remaining four aircraft did not last long in Qantas service. They were sold in 1998 and were later converted to pure freighters. They all continue to operate in this roll for Midex as at 2010.

The History of TAA's Airbus A300B4-203 VH-TAA

'James Cook'

The order for four Airbus A300B4s for Trans-Australia Airlines (TAA) was signed by the then Chairman of the Australian National Airlines Commission Sir Richard R. Law-Smith and the Regional Sales Manager of Airbus Industrie Mr Hugh Tansley on December 10, 1974. The first of these aircraft - VH-TAA (c/n 134) - was fitted with General Electric CF6-50C2 engines and was test flown at Toulouse as F-WZEJ on May 6, 1981.

It was ferried Toulouse-Hamburg (Lemwerder) for fit out to company specification on May 9, 1981. Once this had been completed it was flown back to Toulouse where it was entered onto Australian Aircraft Register as VH-TAA on June 29, 1981, registered to Australian National Airlines Commission.

It was accepted by the airline's representatives at Toulouse on July 1, 1981 and prepared for its delivery flight to Australia. Departing Toulouse on July 10 it arrived at Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport on July 13 having flown Toulouse-Bahrain-Madras-Kuala Lumpur-Perth-Melbourne.

The aircraft was named 'James Cook' after the famous English explorer who discovered the east coast of Australia in 1770. Following a period of route proving and demonstration flights it entered regular passenger service when it operated Flight TN534 Melbourne-Sydney on July 22, 1981.

Due to a downturn in traffic because of declining economic conditions in the early 1980s the airline sought an overseas lease for this aircraft. It was withdrawn from service at Melbourne on February 15, 1984 and prepared for lease to Condor Airways - a Lufthansa subsidiary. It was cancelled from the Australian Aircraft Register on March 16, 1984. Three days later it was officially entered onto the German Aircraft Register as D-AITA before departing Melbourne as LH1282 on the delivery flight to Hamburg, Germany.

As this was only a short term lease it arrived back in Melbourne as LH6690 on October 30, 1984. After undergoing maintenance it was returned to the Australian Aircraft Register as VH-TAA on November 7, 1984. Economic conditions were not conducive to the aircraft returning to service with Trans-Australia Airlines so a lease was negotiated with Air Niugini. This lease was to commence from November 27.

On November 23, 1984 it was once again cancelled from the Australian Aircraft Register. It was entered onto the Papua New Guinea Aircraft Register as P2-ANG on November 27. It operated its first Air Niugini revenue service when it flew Sydney-Brisbane-Port Moresby as PX4 on November 28. Whilst in service with Air Niugini it wore the distinctive 'Bird of Paradise' livery. It was given the nickname 'Fruit Loops' by TAA staff as this livery reminded them of a character used by Kelloggs on a breakfast cereal at the time.

Trans-Australia Airlines was renamed Australian Airlines on August 4, 1986. This did not affect the lease of the aircraft. It operated its final Air Niugini revenue service on March 11, 1989 before being flown to Singapore for a complete overhaul. The official lease to Air Niugini was terminated on May 3, 1989 and the aircraft was returned to Australian Airlines in Melbourne on June 8, 1989.

Once again it returned to the Australian Aircraft Register as VH-TAA on June 15. It re-entered service with Australian Airlines when it flew Melbourne-Sydney on June 16. Australian Airlines was purchased by Qantas on September 14, 1992 and it operated its first service in the full Qantas livery when it flew Melbourne-Sydney on July 29, 1993.

Australian Airlines officially merged with Qantas Airways on October 31, 1993 but ownership was not transferred to Qantas until December 8, 1993. It departed Melbourne as QF6000 to undergo maintenance with British Aerospace on August 30, 1994 flying Melbourne-Darwin-Singapore-Colombo-Bahrain-Larnaca-Bristol (Filton). Once this had been completed it was returned to Qantas in Melbourne on October 3, 1994.

In February 1996 it was again flown to England as QF6024 to undergo maintenance with British Aerospace. This time the ferry route was Melbourne-Nadi-Honolulu-Vancouver-Montreal (Mirabel)-Bristol (Filton).

Its operating days with Qantas were now numbered. Its final Qantas revenue service was on August 13, 1998 when it flew Sydney-Melbourne. Withdrawn from use it was stored at Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport having flown 34,927 hours with 24,395 landings.

Pinnacle Air Cargo Enterprises LLC trading as Pace Cargo were interested in the aircraft and it was sold to them in September 1998. Cancelled from Australian Aircraft Register for the last time on September 8, 1998 it was immediately entered onto U.S. Aircraft Register as N370PC.

Not hanging around for any length of time it departed Melbourne on a ferry flight to Dresden, Germany for conversion to a freighter on September 10, 1998. Once this work had been completed it was ferried Dresden-Bristol (Filton) by DASA on March 10, 1999 before being ferried Bristol (Filton)-Bangor-Roswell later that month for lease to Express.net, Florida.

It was observed at Miami, Florida in full Express.net livery operating for Emery Air Freight on May 21, 1999. The aircraft was ferried Sacramento-Marana, Arizona as XNA9370 (Express.net) on return to the lessor on June 30, 2006, before being placed in storage at Marana, Arizona.

It remained in storage at Marana until it was ferried Marana-Tucson on December 6, 2007. From there it was ferried Tucson-Gander-Paris (Orly) for further storage on December 8. It was then leased to Midex Airlines Ltd, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. It was observed at Abu Dhabi as N370PC on April 28, 2009. Its registration was cancelled from the U.S. Aircraft Register on June 1, 2009 before being registered as A6-MDF on the United Arab Emirates Aircraft Register.

It is currently being operated as a freighter by Midex Airlines.



F-WZEJ. Trans Australia

Toulouse Airport, France. May 1981

In the full livery awaiting delivery. This colour scheme was often referred to as the 'Camel Hump' livery

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VH-TAA. Trans Australia
Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport. January 1982



Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport. January 1982

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Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. December 1982



D-AITA. Condor

Hamburg Airport, Germany. May 1984

Leased to Condor as it could not be utilised fully by TAA
due to a downturn in Australian economic conditions

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D-AITA. Condor

Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. November 1984

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P2-ANG. Air Niugini

Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. December 1984

Whilst operated by Air Niugini this aircraft was referred to as 'Fruit Loops' by T.A.A. staff

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P2-ANG. Air Niugini
Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport. June 1985



P2-ANG. Australian Airlines

Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. June 1989

Repainted into the new livery it was test flown with the
Papua New Guinea registration

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VH-TAA. Australian Airlines
Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport. June 1991



Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. August 1992

The 'Sydney Olympic Games 2000' logo was painted
behind the cockpit window

© R. N. Smith Collection



Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. August 1993

In the full livery with the subtitle 'The Australian Airline'
below the forward cabin windows

© G. Bennett



Brisbane Airport. June 1995

The Qantas '75 Years' Anniversary decal was applied in front of the forward cabin door

© P. J. Gates



Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. August 1997



Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. September 1998



N370PC. Pinnacle Air Cargo

Melbourne Tullamarine Airport. September 1998

It departed Melbourne in the basic Qantas livery for the last time on September 10, 1998

© G. Bennett



A6-MDF. Midex Airlines

Sharjah International Airport. December 2009

Having been converted to full freighter configuration it continues flying on a regular basis

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General Specifications

Airbus A300B4-102

Wingspan:	44.84 metres (147 feet 1 inch)
Wing area:	260 square metres (2,799 square feet)
Length:	53.62 metres (175 feet 9 inches)
Height:	16.53 metres (54 feet)
Wheel track:	9.61 metres (31 feet 6 inches)
Wheel base:	18.63 metres (61 feet 1 inch)
Weights:	Max Ramp Weight: 166,045 kg (365,740 pounds)
	Maximum Take-off: 165,000 kg (363,750 pounds)
	Maximum Landing: 134,120 kg (295,420 pounds)
	Max Zero Fuel Weight: 124,110 kg (273,370 pounds)
Engines:	2 x General Electric CF6-50C2
Engine Thrust:	233 kN (52,000 pounds)
Fuel Capacity:	62,000 litres (13,640 imp gallons)
Range:	6,670 km (3,600 nm)
Maximum Speed:	470 kts (871 km / hr at 35,000 feet)
Cruise Speed:	447 kts (829 km / hr at 35,000 feet)
Normal Cruise Height:	10,000 metres (33,000 feet)
Seating:	269 in typical two class configuration
Crew:	Flight: 3 Cabin: 7

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