

Age of Jets Not All Roses

WASHINGTON (AP) — The jets have surpassed all expectations — not only in their spectacular success but in the problems that success created.

This is the irony of the aerjet age's fourth anniversary. Almost every achievement has been tempered by accompanying headaches. The jets literally shrank the world by 40 per cent almost overnight. In the same breath, they presented the airlines with massive economic problems — not only in their enormous cost but their immense carrying capacity, which adds up to supply exceeding demand.

The cost of the jet age is best expressed by these figures:

- Most jets originally were priced around \$5 million, including spare parts. A 1962 jetliner sells for more than \$6 million.

- The major U.S. airlines have \$2.5 billion invested in their jet fleets, which is 50 per cent more than they had tied up in their propeller-driven fleets at the start of the jet age.

- In 1955, a single airliner seat represented \$20,000 in property investment. In 1962, the investment cost per jet seat was \$46,000.

- A piston-engine DC7 or Constellation requires 14 pieces of supporting ground equipment valued at \$42,000. A jet needs 15 pieces costing nearly \$150,000.

- Airport costs have mushroomed because of the jets. The New York Port Authority's pre-jet investment at Idlewild was \$221 million.

- In 1955, slightly more than a half-cent of every airline revenue dollar went for interest payments on new piston equipment. The figure for the jet age is 3 cents out of every revenue dollar.

The price tag on spare parts inventory for a major carrier was \$19 million in 1957. It is now around \$50 million for the average airline.

Balanced against these astronomical costs, however, is the productivity of the jetliner. A single jet can do the work of three or even four piston-engine planes. For example, a DC3 in 1938 did a day's work when it flew from New York to Little Rock, Ark. A four-engine piston plane's daily utilization involved a New York-Los Angeles flight. The jet's minimum workday covers a round trip between the East and West coasts.

This productivity has added up to one prime fact about jets: Basically, they have been money-makers although not to the extent the airlines hoped. If they were flown full or nearly full more often, they would be unbelievably profitable. But their very size—which has led to excess capacity—keep the black ink from flowing very heavily.

SAFETY RECORD EXCELLENT

The U.S. jets' safety record can be summed up in one word: excellent. In four years, there have been only three fatal accidents involving pure jets on scheduled flight, plus a sabotage case.

The three accidents took 194 lives, underlining the inescapable fact that when a giant jet crashes, the death toll can be extremely high. Yet despite these fatalities, the jet fatality rate since Oct. 26, 1958, has been only 0.41 deaths per 100 million passenger miles flown, compared with a rate of 0.58 for propeller driven planes.

If there is any pilot criticism as far as safety is concerned, it is directed at airports. The Air Line Pilots Assn. has said most jet operational problems involve inadequate airports.

As of mid-1962, U.S. airlines were operating about 340 pure jets. By 1965, the jet fleet in this country alone will total nearly 500. The nation's carriers still have about 1,200 piston-engine planes in service plus about 260 prop-jets. The most startling statistic of the jet age is that while only one out of six airliners is a pure jet, the jets are carrying seven out of every 10 passengers.

The jet influx naturally dumped hundreds of suddenly outmoded piston planes on the market, creating a new problem for the industry. For the first time in aviation history, a new airliner rendered its predecessors obsolete overnight.

COACH TRAVEL GROWS

One of the byproducts of the jet age has been the steadily increasing trend toward coach travel, more on the jets than older planes. TWA, for example, started operating its jets originally with a cabin configuration one-third first class and two-thirds coach. Its configuration today on a 140-passenger jet is only 20 first class seats and 120 coach seats.

Economically, some experts think the next stage of the jet age will be a shift to a single-class travel—at fares ranging somewhere between present first-class and coach tariffs.

The first four years of the jet age also spawned an unwanted child—the noise problem.

The industry, along with the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA), has tried valiantly to keep the jets in the air while keeping protests down. To a certain extent, they have succeeded although there undoubtedly is a residue of resentment in many cities.

The blunt truth is that nobody has figured out a way to lower the noise level of the engine. Until a scientific breakthrough can be achieved, the noise problem will remain unsolved. The airlines and the FAA have compromised as much as they can and still stay within a margin of safe operations with special noise abatement procedures.

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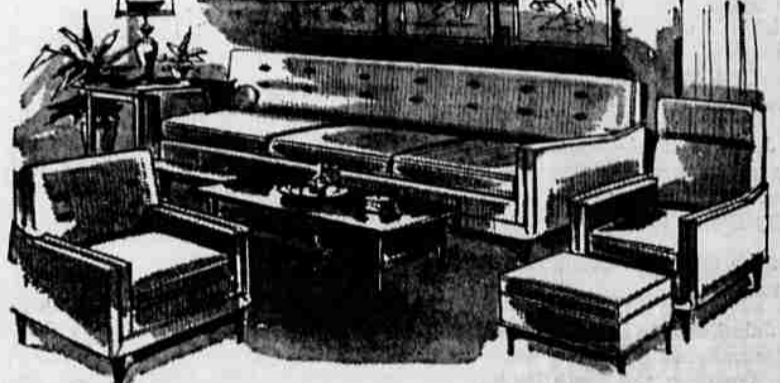
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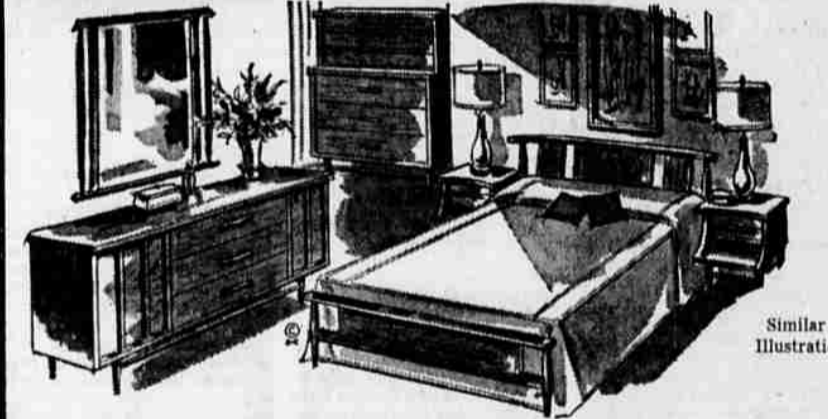
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