

Australian Air-Ferry

August Newsletter

Short on Oil

Shortly after passing over the top of Rhodes Island in the Mediterranean Sea, I noticed a drop in the hydraulic pressure, the gauge is located on the left-hand side panel and it had dropped an inch below the green arc (normal operating pressure).

No cause for alarm initially, but if this trend continued it could cause a gear extension failure, no brakes, loss of steering on the ground, and an inability to extend the flaps.

Constant monitoring confirmed that the trend was indeed continuing and at this rate we would have very little pressure by the time we got to Larnaca (Cyprus).



Approximately 100nm from Larnaca the low-pressure lights illuminated on the central warning panel, confirmation that we'd be arriving without the assistance of anything operated by hydraulic pressure.

The first check was the emergency gear extension and emergency brake accumulators, both of which were maintaining maximum pressure.

As we neared the runway we slowed the aircraft down, and selected gear down. This was all done early in anticipation of our having problems.

The trio crew watched with anticipation while the gear cycled, the front green light illuminated and then the right main wheel light illuminated, but the left main gear remained in the unsafe position. There was insufficient pressure to push the wheel into the locked position.

We'd gotten a head start on reading about the emergency gear extension procedures prior to our arrival so the emergency gear extension procedures were initiated immediately, as soon as the handle was pulled the gear light turned green.

Now with three greens on downwind we advised the tower that we had hydraulic-pressure-problems, and they simply asked, "can you land safely", to which we replied yes, most definitely.

On final approach the flaps had managed to extend partially, and luckily this was a really long runway so we had ample time to stop.

After touching down the brakes were applied and the aircraft did not slow down, the emergency brakes were activated and again nothing happened. The aircraft was slowing rapidly and we were now contemplating how we might be able to vacate the runway without any steering.

The tower had asked which exit we might be able to take, and other aircraft in the circuit were asked to extend their circuits to allow time to discover a solution.

As we approached the high-speed taxiway differential power was applied to turn the aircraft to the right and up the taxiway, luckily this proved an effective steering method.

A second right turn was executed in order to head the aircraft back towards the parking area. As soon as we made the second turn we shut down the engines, it would have been foolish to enter a busy ramp area without brakes.

We notified the tower that a tug would be required to move the stricken aircraft to a safe parking area.

Shortly after shutting down a tug arrived and we were towed to an appropriate parking area, where the aircraft was chocked.

By now you'd be wondering how we got ourselves into this situation – Two weeks previous to this flight we'd flown to Greece, test flown the aircraft and left two very capable engineers with a comprehensive list of items that required attention.

This aircraft had not been flown for three years and our initial checks and flight tests had revealed a few items that would require attention.

After two weeks we'd received notification that the aircraft was ready to move and our crew headed back to Greece.

All the problems had been rectified and the aircraft was deemed ready to commence the journey back to Guam.

All the problems were rectified and the test flights suggested that everything was fully functional.

After all this checking and double checking this problem had emerged on the first leg to Larnaca, we believe that a hydraulic hose had ruptured on the nose wheel steering during our taxi out, which caused us all these problems.

The following day our engineers, who were co-incidentally on board the aircraft in case of such a situation occurring, started the repairs. And to our amazement they'd remedied our hydraulic problem before night-fall, the emergency gear extension had been reset and with much assistance from the very helpful Cyprus locals we were ready to go again the next day.

Which was lucky because the local currency was very strong, so an extended stay would have proven expensive.



Cyprus Coastline

The following day we taxied out did several ground checks and found everything to be working appropriately so we departed for Bahrain, our next re-fuelling point.

During the climb we were informed by air traffic control that we'd have to climb to 13,000 ft to comply with Beirut air traffic control requirements for our transit, which took us right over the top of the airport.

We pulled on the oxygen masks as we passed though 10,000ft and managed to arrive at 13,000ft well before transiting Beirut.

Only a few short weeks after our transit they'd started bombing the airport and city.

The next challenge was to get through Syria, and then Jordan, where we passed within 30 nm of the Iraqi border.

All eyes were fixed cautiously on the GPS as we headed south along the border, we didn't want to stray into Iraqi airspace accidentally.

As the miles from Iraq increased our crew breathed a sigh of relief, and everyone welcomed the relative safety of Saudi Arabian air space.

After landing in Bahrain we were greeted on the ramp by a very friendly local airport employee, who was happy to organize the re-fuellers and deliver us to the local weather/briefing office.

After paying the appropriate fees we started the aircraft and headed for Muscat (Oman). A few short hours later we landed into what could be described as the hottest, clammiest, most unpleasant evening imaginable.

After passing through the terminal we walked through an air blanket which delivered you quickly and without warning into the local environment. I can remember feeling the strong blast of cold air from the air wall blowing straight down and then stepping into the clammy hot air a fraction of a second later.

Several quick steps later we were seated in an old but air-conditioned taxi on our way to the Golden Tulip.

After a night's rest and a hearty meal we were on our way back to the aircraft for the refueling process, this uncomfortable hour left everyone of us with cloths that were saturated in sweat.

We climbed into the aircraft and engaged the air-conditioning packs as quickly as was humanly possible, after completing the engine start checks. Oman was not a good place to be wearing hot uniforms.

After getting airborne we tracked for Male in the Maldives, the plan was to avoid any major populous, like India, and Male seemed like a nice island resort in which to overnight.



[Hulhule Island Resort](#) is the only accommodation on the same island as the airport.

Again after eating and sleeping we departed Male heading for Medan Indonesia, where we managed to climb the old Shorts to about 15,000ft to avoid very high terrain running north/south through the middle of this portion of Indonesia.

Medan turned out to be a very pleasant overnight, previous delivery's to Jakarta had left a lasting impression that would not be easily forgotten, but Medan was a completely different city.

The trio found a very nice restaurant in a long street lined with eatery's, that regularly spilled out onto the footpath.

After dinner we decided that our journey back to the accommodation should be done in a tri-cycle. Imagine a very small 120cc motorbike with a side-car attached. We managed to get two people in the side-car (built for one) and another person rode on the back of the motor-bike.

Even the locals, who commonly have three or even four on a bike were watching in amazement as our weary western crew clung onto the bike as it sped through heavy traffic on the way back to the accommodation.

The following day we found ourselves headed towards Brunei (Malaysia), where we landed very early in the afternoon, it was Saturday and we'd decided that our travels would need to cease, so we had Sunday off and explored the Brunei province.

Monday morning we were back at work bright and rested, an early morning departure got us into Palau for a quick re-fuel and then onto Guam in the one day, this was the aircrafts final destination.

This was a trip that had demanded previously unmatched co-operation and co-ordination between ourselves and associated companies, who'd also provided their expertise in this relocation.

Thank you to everyone who was involved and we look forward to working with you all again.

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