



Jeremy Clark

Air Munchkinland

Jeremy Clark decries the move towards smaller Economy seats on long haul flights



Those of you who have met the current (and original) Mrs C, will agree that she is a woman of calm and reasonableness. To have put up with me for the past 36+ years requires a level of patience rarely found in humans.

However, whilst listening to a report on the BBC the other day she was heard to comment "That's ridiculous!".

This was after hearing travel reporter Simon Calder disclosing the news that some airlines are now squeezing an extra Economy seat into the B777 making it ten abreast.

Included with his report was the news that Ryanair will ram a further eight seats into the 189 seat 737. No real surprises there and you are unlikely to notice the difference when it actually comes.

The other culprits are surprising. Air France, not in the top five of the world's best but by no means the worst, which uses high-density configured 777s to South America, perhaps to get them used to that 'cosy carnival feeling', but I really would not have expected this from a "5 Star Airline".

"Some airlines are now squeezing an extra Economy seat into the B777 making it ten abreast"

The move by Qatar Airlines reduces the width of each seat by almost two inches, to just 17 inches across. QR confirmed that all new 777 orders will be 10 across in Economy and will refit its existing 777-300ERs by 2016.**

Ten-across seating brings the 777 in line with Dreamliners, which at 17.2 inches offers one of the smallest Economy seats of all 787 operating airlines. This begs the question: How much do airlines really value the Economy passenger?

It is well known that the majority of high-yield revenue is derived from Premium cabins, but is the Economy passenger really looked at as merely ballast?

Predictably, Americans have invented a word for this – "upgauging", and they have embraced this shoehorning policy with zeal. American, Southwest and Delta all achieved recent growth without adding to fleets. As part of

an overall redo of 777-200 interiors, American is going from 247 seats to 289 seats*. At what cost?

The space has to come from somewhere and people, especially in America, aren't getting any thinner. Of course this could be all part of some ploy to make travelling in the back such misery that, in time, they'll happily fork out for Business seats. Either way, an essential carry-on item will be some baby-oil to help with moving about back there.

I have to say that Mrs C is more than grateful for the opportunities to turn left at the door on long hauls and appreciates the benefits to be found there, until, that is, she checks the credit card statements at which point I hear her say: "Well that's ridiculous!". •

*Dallas Morning News
** Doha News

