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3 Airlines Halt A380 Flights Over Engine Explosion

By **KEVIN DREW** and **NICOLA CLARK**

HONG KONG — Three airlines suspended flights of Airbus A380 superjumbo jetliners on Thursday after an engine on a Qantas plane blew apart shortly after takeoff from Singapore.

Debris fell on an Indonesian island, and the plane, with more than 450 people aboard, spent 90 tense minutes circling with its three remaining engines, dumping fuel and preparing for an emergency landing back in Singapore. The episode ended with passengers cheering and praising the flight crew for maintaining calm. There were no reported injuries.

Justin Dubon, an Airbus spokesman in France, said it was the first uncontained engine failure and the most serious problem experienced by the A380, which entered service in 2007. Such a failure is extremely rare and occurs when components fly off the main engine housing, often with explosive force.

Qantas — Australia's largest carrier — Singapore Airlines and Lufthansa each canceled flights. Qantas, with six of the A380s, and Singapore, with 11, grounded their fleets. Lufthansa, which has three A380s, called off a late-night flight from Frankfurt. On Friday morning, Singapore Airlines resumed flying its A380s.

The European Aviation Safety Agency, which regulates Airbus and the engine's maker, Rolls-Royce, said it was working closely with the Australian Transport Safety Bureau to determine the cause. "We take this issue very seriously," said Jeremie Teahan, an agency spokesman in Cologne, Germany.

The A380 can seat up to 800 passengers. Currently, 37 are being flown by five airlines. The 20 operated by Qantas, Singapore and Lufthansa all use the Rolls-Royce Trent 900 engine. Seventeen others operated by [Air France](#) and Emirates use a different engine.

The 37 planes have completed roughly 21,400 flights, said Mr. Dubon, the Airbus spokesman. Previous mechanical problems with the A380 have been relatively minor, involving fuel and braking systems, Mr. Dubon said.

Flight 32 was minutes into its route to Sydney when the engine blew out.

One passenger said he heard a noise “like a bang, like a shotgun going off, like a big, loud gun.”

“My whole body just went to jelly,” the passenger, Tyler Wooster, told Australia’s Nine Network, “and I didn’t know what was going to happen as we were going down, if we were going to be O.K.”

Passengers said the flight crew made frequent and reassuring announcements. Some took cellphone video of smoke pouring from under the left wing.

The flight was set upon by emergency crews after it returned to Changi International Airport in Singapore about 11:45 a.m. Local news media broadcast images of the charred No. 2 engine — the inside engine on the left wing — being doused by fire engines. Television images from the island of Batam in Indonesia showed people holding large chunks of metal, some bearing the red and white paint of the Qantas insignia.

Photographs taken by several passengers from inside the plane and posted on the Internet showed at least two large **punctures on the upper side of the wing**, with bits of metal skin protruding.

“It looks like there are a couple of pretty good sized holes with the metal blown out,” said William R. Voss, president of the Flight Safety Foundation, based in Alexandria, Va. “That almost certainly means that debris came up through the bottom of the wing.”

Alan Joyce, Qantas’s chief executive, said the airline would suspend the A380s “until we are confident that Qantas safety requirements have been met,” according to a statement on the airline’s Web site. But he said that the episode would not affect Qantas’s current order for 14 more A380s.

In a statement, Rolls-Royce, based in London, said the company felt it was “prudent to recommend that a number of basic precautionary engine checks are performed,” given that the Trent 900 engine had been in service for only three years. It added that “it would be inappropriate to draw any conclusions” so early in the investigation.

Nicholas Ionides, a Singapore Airlines spokesman, said that based on the Rolls-Royce advice, the airline was temporarily suspending flights by its A380s.

A Lufthansa spokesman, Aage Dünhaupt, said that an A380 that flew from Frankfurt on Thursday afternoon for Tokyo would undergo an inspection of its engines after landing on Friday. Josh Rosenstock, a Rolls-Royce spokesman, declined to give further details about the

types of inspection it was recommending. (Rolls-Royce is a separate company from the carmaker, a subsidiary of [BMW](#).)

The episode represents a fresh setback for Rolls-Royce after a different engine model, designed to power Boeing's long-awaited [787 Dreamliner](#), had an uncontained failure that caused minor damage to a testing center in August. The failure of that engine, a Trent 1000, led Boeing to postpone deliveries for the 787 — already two years behind schedule — until early next year.

Qantas, an airline with a reputation for safety, has experienced several problems this year. In late March, a Qantas Boeing 747 bound for Singapore returned to Sydney after a pilot reported mechanical problems that affected one of the plane's engines, according to Australian news media. On March 31, the airline reported that a brake had locked up as an A380 landed in Sydney, causing two tires to blow out.

On Aug. 31, the airline reported a "catastrophic failure" in an engine of a 747 flying from San Francisco to Sydney, according to the newspaper *The Australian*. The jetliner returned safely to San Francisco.

Kevin Drew reported from Hong Kong, and Nicola Clark from Paris.