

Are Russian-Made Airplanes More Dangerous?

Posted by: Carol Matlack on July 25

Are Russian planes more dangerous than Western ones? In the past 10 days, two Russian-built jets have crashed in Iran, killing a total of 185 people. On July 24, 17 people died when an Aria Airlines Ilyushin-62 skidded off the runway while landing at the city of Mashhad. On July 15, a Tupolev Tu-154 operated by Caspian Airlines crashed enroute from Tehran to Yerevan, Armenia, killing all 168 aboard. It was the fourth Tu-154 crash in Iran since 2002.

Those are scary numbers. But – bearing in mind that we don't yet know the cause of either accident – it would be a mistake to jump to conclusions about the planes involved. Just this week, my colleague Mark Scott and I compiled a list of the [world's most accident-prone planes](#), using data from Ascend, a British outfit that advises the insurance industry. The plane with the worst ranking – that is, the most fatal accidents per number of hours flown – was not Russian. It was the earliest version of the Boeing 737. (Another Ilyushin plane, the Il-76, was second, and the Tu-154 was third)

No one would accuse [Boeing](#) of building unsafe planes. But even the most reliable aircraft, as it ages, needs to be scrupulously maintained, and the pilots who fly it need to be carefully trained. The problem is that older planes, like the original 737, the Airbus A310 – and yes, Tupelovs and Ilyushins – tend to be flown by small airlines in relatively poor countries.

These carriers often are hard-pressed to pay for essential maintenance and crew training. And, as was the case with Caspian and Aria, they tend not to fly in the U.S. and Western Europe, which have the world's toughest air-safety regulations. Some carriers involved in deadly crashes – such as Kyrgyzstan's Itek Air, which lost a Boeing 737 in an August 2008 crash that killed 68 – have been barred from flying in Europe because of subpar safety records.

The bottom line: When it comes to safety, the airline operating the plane matters more than the make of the aircraft.

Reader Comments

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July 25, 2009 09:19 PM

Russian planes aren't more dangerous to fly, the engines they use are. Russian made jet engines are notorious for being substandard, fuel hogs, dirty and unreliable.

Maryam

July 26, 2009 10:33 AM

Russian planes are not that much bad, but the most of countries use old verson's of Russian planes. More over the climate of Russia is totally different than Iran or Egyp. More over it is better to be logical not fanatic about Russian technology.