

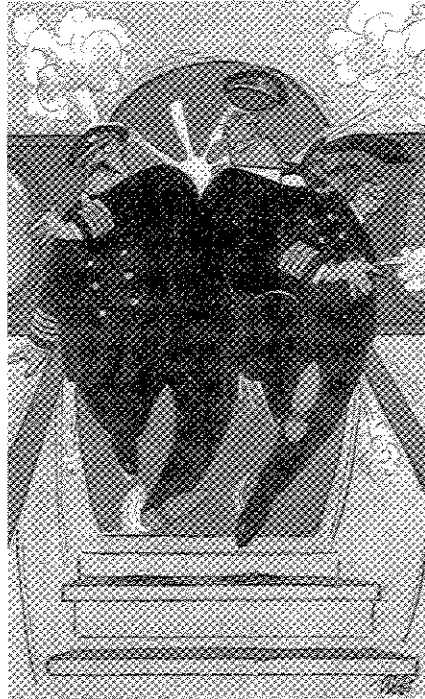
# THE SCANDINAVIAN FLAT TYRE SAGA

*"Ladies and gentlemen this is the Captain Speaking. . . there Will be a Short delay. . ."*

*By Chris Roberts.*

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GOTHENBURG—pronounced Yutterborj by the locals, which is one good reason why even dedicated linguists balk at learning Swedish. Gothenburg: world-famous tourist destination, ever since it hosted the Eurovision Song Contest. Gothenburg: location of the Scandinavian Flat Tyre Saga. It was June 9th 1994. Captain Dave Hood and I were doing a round trip, LHR-Gothenburg-LHR. Dave was in the right-hand seat, because he wanted to practise being ambidextrous. The first sector (mine) had been a textbook operation (as always), culminating in a perfect landing (as soft as a silkworm's fart, as my admirers would say). The trouble started just before push-back. We had just received our start-up clearance, when a disembodied voice, sounding like a mechanical hurdy-gurdy, informed us through the intercom that one of the tyres appeared low on pressure, and asked if we would like to have it checked. Dave had noticed nothing amiss on his walkround, but we naturally agreed. A couple of minutes later the SAS engineer, Dagfinn Nordbo (do not ask me to pronounce that), proclaimed triumphantly, "De pressure is zero!" Dave and I looked at one another aghast. We shot out of our seats and, side by sides ran through the flight-deck door and down the steps—quite an achievement when you are as heroically-built as Dave and I. At first glance both tyres on the starboard leg appeared identical and normal. However, a look at the pressure gauge confirmed that the inboard tyre was definitely pneumatically-challenged. "That is a no-go item," announced Dave, because he is a Route Check Captain, and therefore knows the Despatch Deviation Manual backwards. We looked at the tyre again, and could not understand how Dagfinn had been able to detect the defect with his naked eye. We asked him the secret, and he simply smiled and shrugged (in Swedish). My theory is that he must have spotted a mischievous lad ramming a matchstick down the valve-core, just as we used to do to Brookes Minor's Raleigh in the Fourth Form bike sheds. I then decided to give the tyres a hefty kick, confident in the knowledge



that, if any tyre were devoid of pressure, the toe of my shoe would vanish deep into the soft rubber. Wrong! Both tyres were like iron to the fragile human foot. I have been kicking tyres for 37 years, which therefore works out at about 30,000 wasted kicks! "Ladies and gentlemen. This is the captain speaking. There will be a short delay while our engineering team change a defective tyre." Engineering Team! Dagfinn and his dog, plus an Austin Metro car jack! Forty sweaty minutes later the new tyre was in position, and we prepared to impart the good news to the passengers. Dagfinn, however, had other ideas. "Now ve change de udder von!" he said, with a broad grin. "What!" chorused Tweedledum and Tweedledee, "Do you have shares in Goodyear?" Dagfinn was really enjoying himself, now. "Oh no!" he said, "I do not efen haff anudder tyre, but de book say dat ve muss change both!" "OK. Dave, will you tell the passengers, or will I?" I lost the toss. "Ladies and gentlemen. I am very sorry, but there will be a further delay while we change another wheel. Unfortunately, we do not actually have one with us at the moment..." The remainder of my apologies and feeble excuses were drowned out by hoots, jeers, catcalls and

whistles. The cabin crew were now at the business end of a very active hornets' nest. It suddenly became essential for every passenger to leave the aircraft and have a smoke or call the office or phone granny or prop up the bar or buy a meal or go home and/or, best of all, change a soggy bandage! This last request came from a gentleman with his left leg wrapped up in a blood-soaked Crimean War field dressing. The nurse with him was muttering dark threats about what she would do to the airline if we failed to get her patient to hospital in London by a certain deadline. The stress was beginning to build up all around. Meanwhile, search parties were combing the suburbs of Gothenburg, attempting to locate a 737 wheel compatible with our own. Eventually one was found under a pile of old Harpic bottles, in a toilet cupboard, belonging to KLM. The new wheel was then positioned alongside the aircraft while attempts were made to obtain permission to use it. This meant tele-phoning Amsterdam. "Please may we borrow your spare wheel, and a bottle of Harpic?" This request was met with a stony silence (in Dutch), followed by the sound of a receiver being replaced. The next try was also a failure. "Please call back later. We are very busy." In desperation, we sent an urgent telex which, thank goodness, resulted in a positive response. Dagfinn and his dog set to right away, and thirty minutes later were on our way, almost three hours behind schedule. The main object of this story is to point out to my fellow pilots that, to our untrained eyes, it is very difficult to detect a flat tyre if it is on the same undercarriage leg as a healthy one, full up with lovely PSI. Both tyres look, feel, taste and smell the same. The only simple solution I can offer is to nip down to Halfords and buy a handful of those clever little indicators which you attach to the valve of each tyre. These are set to a predetermined pressure, and turn red when the PSI drop below it. I offered this as a Staff Suggestion, in the hope that the reward I might receive for it would help me eke out my meagre pension after July 21st, when I finally retired from British Airways.