



Above and right - TMA's engineers upgraded and standardised the Twin Otter's cockpit layout.

Right - Flying in the Maldives is literally by the soles of the feet! (Airliner World)

aircraft are painted in a light white colour, while one of the new Series 400s also has 'Conrad – Maldives Rangali Island – The luxury of being yourself' titles and wears an overall blue colour scheme.

"The flying time from here [Malé] to resorts varies between 25 and 40 minutes, depending on proximity, and passengers can use this opportunity to take in the breathtaking aerial view of the multitude of coral islands, coral reefs and shallows of the Maldivian archipelago," continued Edward. "We currently have 85 pilots of which 75% are Maldivian. The numbers are bolstered in our peak season – the northern hemisphere winter – with expats from the US, Canada and Australia who come over on six-month contracts. In the summer, many of them fly waterbombers on fire-fighting missions."

Edward believes flying will increase in the next few years as new resorts open. At present, each aircraft averages around 100 hours per month. The old Royal Air Force staging post and airfield on Gan Island in the south is being developed into a full international hub – initially with charter flights – and a number of Twin Otters from the new combined carrier could be based there to serve new southern destinations.

"On our busy days we can carry around 1,500 passengers, but at our busiest we have exceeded 2,300 in one day," said Edward. "If an inbound flight is delayed, the tourists here remain at their resorts and we have to lay on extra flights for them as well as those scheduled for that day. However, we only fly by day so we are limited to operating from around 6am to 6pm. It is not a good idea [from a safety point of view] to operate a floatplane at night.

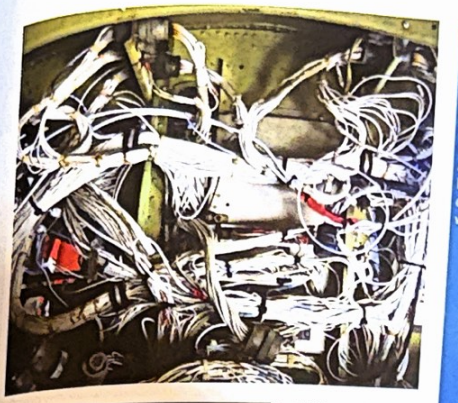
"We aim to employ pilots with a minimum of a Commercial Pilot's Licence (CPL), with at least 1,000 flying hours and preferably with floatplane experience, although a wheels-to-float conversion course is around six hours. Our pilots are flying an average of around 800 hours per year."

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Below - TMA has a mix of the classic de Havilland Canada DHC-6-300 Twin Otters and the newer Viking Series 400s.







TMA found that there was a lot of redundancy in the wiring looms – especially after new radios and a traffic alert and collision avoidance system [TCAS] were fitted.

Engineering

TMA's hangar area is on the west side of the airport and aircraft are pulled out of the sea on a trailer and towed across the airfield for servicing. "It saves space in the hangar," said Ahmed 'Shad' Shahid, the Engineering and Maintenance Manager. "An aircraft on floats, on a paved surface, is a lot higher than on wheels." Shad has around 112 people working for him on the engineering side and 60 on the technical side – of which 20 are licensed engineers. They are split between normal aircraft operations at the TMA terminal and hangar inspections. "We give the aircraft a thorough service about every 125 hours," said Shad. "We also put them through a C or D Check every three years – the normal length is five, but we find that operating on salt water day to day, it is well worth the increased frequency to check for corrosion." His engineering department operates from 5am – to get the aircraft ready for a 6am take-off – until around 9.30pm, after the day's flying has finished. "We have built a new workshop for rewiring work," he added. "We found that there was a lot of redundancy in the wiring looms – especially after we fitted new radios and a Traffic Alert and Collision Avoidance System [TCAS] – and as a result we have managed to lighten the aircraft considerably. Virtually the whole fleet has been rewired in the last two years." Each aircraft takes about ten days for the rewiring and continuity »

Below - The interior has a one-plus-two seating arrangement with all passengers having a good view of the local scenery. (Airliner World)



Maldivian Air Taxi (MV/MAT)

The other seaplane operator on the islands is Maldivian Air Taxi (MAT) with a fleet of 21 Twin Otters. It was formed in 1993 by Danish investors and started operations in the same year with a Cessna 208 Caravan. This was soon replaced by initially three Twin Otters, and the fleet has continued to grow since. Two Bell 212 helicopters were also used in the 1990s. Until 2009, aircraft and some of the crews were leased from Kenn Borek Air in Canada – with an associated maintenance contract – but the Twin Otters have now been bought by MAT. Prior to February 2013, the airline was wholly owned by its chairman Lars Erik Nielsen and employed more than 400 staff operating around 70 movements per day, carrying approximately 400,000 passengers annually.



Historic Fleet			
Ce A185	8Q-MAT		circa 2000
Ce 208	8Q-MAT		1993-1995, written off
Bell 212	8Q-MAX	30820	1995-
	8Q-MAY	30887	1995-Dec 1999, written off
DHC-6-100	8Q-CSL	064	1994-2009
	8Q-IAW	060	1994-1997 became 8Q-TKB then 8Q-MAC, sold 2010
	8Q-QBU	099	1995-2009
	8Q-QHC	021	1995-2009
DHC-6-200	8Q-ENT	224	1994-1997 became 8Q-MAG, sold 1999
	8Q-NTA	146	1996-became 8Q-MAT
DHC-6-300	8Q-LEN	273	1993-1994
	8Q-IOK	273	1996-1997 became 8Q-MAD
	8Q-KBE	693	1996-1998 became 8Q-MAA, sold 2010
	8Q-KBM	279	1995-1997 became 8Q-MAI
	8Q-KBV	287	1996-1997 became 8Q-MAB, sold 2011
	8Q-MAE	464	1997-2006
	8Q-MAK	276	1999-2009
	8Q-MAL	321	1999-2010
	8Q-MAM	339	1999-2010
	8Q-MAQ	611	2001-2011
DHC-6 300	8Q-MAR	382	2004-2009
	8Q-MAS	445	2005-2005, damaged
	8Q-MAU	617	2006-2007
	8Q-MAV	732	2006-2009

Current fleet			
DHC-6-100	8Q-OEQ	044	VIP interior
DHC-6-200	8Q-MAT	146	
DHC-6-300	8Q-MAD	273	
	8Q-MAF	449	
	8Q-MAH	374	
	8Q-MAI	279	
	8Q-MAJ	837	
	8Q-MAN	435	
	8Q-MAO	259	
	8Q-MAP	571	
	8Q-MAW	722	
	8Q-MAX	755	
	8Q-MAZ	774	
	8Q-MBA	691	
	8Q-MBB	659	
	8Q-MBC	256	
	8Q-MBD	283	
	8Q-MBE	561	
	8Q-MBF	375	
	8Q-MBG	288	
	8Q-MBH	585	

Scanned with SwiftScan



The engineering hangar is on the west side of the airport. Aircraft are normally towed across from the dock on wheels, as with floats attached its added height makes it more difficult to work on. (Airliner World)

checks and another ten for fitting the new systems. Canadian company Kenn Borek previously owned MAT, and the aircraft periodically make the journey back to Canada for rework. TMA obtained a Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) qualification to do the work itself, saving about half the work cost.

With the different ages of the aircraft, TMA found that the layouts of many of the cockpits varied slightly – having, for example, different radio boxes. "We have changed from being reactive to becoming proactive and have found that it has saved us time in the long run. Even one of the new Series 400s was delivered 'green' [unpainted], and we did it here. It cost us around 10% of the price quoted by the manufacturer."

TMA employs local students with basic qualifications in physics and chemistry and/or engineering as trainee technicians. After initial work, they may go to the UK for more qualifications before returning for two further years and going on to obtain B1 and B2 qualifications. The airline is looking for two full-time apprentices in 2013. "We only had three locals in 2003," said Shad. "Now it is around 50%."



Below • Two aircraft have a redesigned ten-seat VIP interior, produced by Wipaire, and are used by Beach House Resorts for its VIP customers.

Pilot training

The airline has found that pilot retention has improved over the last five years. "We have a number of local pilots, with some having been with us for over ten years and many more than five," said Flight Operations Manager Mohamed Fahud. "We find that the peak season contract pilots have been with us before and this helps with our training. There is no Twin Otter simulator here so even our trainers and check pilots have to go to Toronto to gain experience. For a new first officer, we insist on around 75 hours of line training."

Mohamed was very complimentary about the new Viking Series 400 aircraft: "It has very modern avionics and a better speed, but for the pilots, its handling characteristics are very similar to the earlier variants."



In January 2013, TMA had a fleet of 23 Twin Otters including three of the new Viking Series 400s – this one is in special Conrad colours. (Airliner World)



Left • The two aircraft with VIP interiors are painted in a white colourscheme. (Airliner World)

Below • Aircraft do not normally stay away from base overnight, but sometimes the pilots and cabincrew can enjoy an evening at a resort.

The future

Following the Blackstone's takeover, no decision had been taken on a new name or colour schemes for the two carriers, as of mid-February. "At present I am still Managing Director of TMA," said Edward. "When the combined company is formed, I will become its Chief Operating Officer – which I am very excited about as the move will bring more opportunities and growth potential for the company."

"The Maldives is a unique and highly desirable holiday destination," said Prakash Melwani, Senior Managing Director and Chief Investment Officer at Blackstone's Private Equity unit, based in New York. "Our investment in MAT and TMA will enable us to build a strong partnership with the country. We have been very impressed by the quality of the management teams of both companies and the sophistication of their operations. We are excited to partner with both airlines, whose seaplane operations have contributed significantly to the development of resort islands further away from Malé and making them accessible to tourists." AWW

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