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## **easyJet in Geneva: a critical analysis**

### **Foreword**

This document is to be sent to the management of easyJet, both in Switzerland and in the United Kingdom. Copies will also be sent to the Swiss Civil Aviation office (OFAC), to the director of Geneva airport, to the Consultative Commission for the fight against nuisances caused by aviation (CCLNTA) and to the committee of the Geneva Airport residents association (ARAG). The author reserves the right to send it to any other persons or institutions, including the various media. Any replies to it should specify whether they also may be shown to any of these persons or institutions.

### **Executive summary**

Mainly in relation to their performance at London Gatwick airport, easyJet has been the subject of much criticism, in particular on the question of poor punctuality (worse than Air Zimbabwe). However, figures compiled by ARAG suggest that easyJet Switzerland is actually worse still, and has been so since at least last summer 2009.

The performance of easyJet Switzerland in Geneva airport has been particularly poor during the summer months of 2010, with July being truly awful. There have been very many flights leaving or arriving extremely late, many others being cancelled or diverted to Lyon, many returns to Geneva being blocked because the aircraft could not arrive back before the airport closure at 00h30 and some cases of a particular aircraft of the easyJet Switzerland fleet unable to fly for one or two days. There have been well-documented cases involving well-known Swiss political and legal people, plus a group of young people who had to organise a demonstration for the media in order to get some satisfaction. There will also have been many anonymous people who will be questioning whether they ever want to fly with easyJet again.

Despite what has been said by spokespersons of easyJet, and even of the airport, that easyJet does have a spare aircraft available, there has been very little sign of this mysterious spare aircraft.

The summer schedules of easyJet Switzerland, which (according to the Director of Geneva airport) are created by the parent company in the UK, have clearly gone beyond what is practical. The occasional agitation of air traffic controllers, in particular in France, is not enough to explain the repeated problems, which tend to occur mostly on Fridays or weekends and to involve popular tourist destinations, in particular those on the Iberian peninsula.

The residents living around the airport are being made to suffer because of these problems. In July, despite the fact that, after their last rotation, almost all of the ten returning aircraft of easyJet Switzerland are scheduled to return between 22h and 23h, only about one in five actually landed before 23h: this is virtually the same proportion as those which landed after midnight.

To the people represented by ARAG, this is unacceptable. Like everyone, they believe that they have a right to a reasonable night's sleep. It is true that some have had their residences

soundproofed by the airport, but in this very hot month of July, having to sleep in bedrooms with closed windows is not something that many people would choose to do.

ARAG requests that easyJet Switzerland be obliged to work with more reasonable schedules, to have a proper plan to deal with any shortage of aircraft and to be prepared to explain in details any cancellations, deviations or extremely delayed flights and all flights which actually operate in the airport closure grace period (currently from midnight until 00h30).

## **My conclusion**

This conclusion is mine and mine alone, though I suspect that many people would agree with me.

Geneva has surely been a very profitable airport at which to base easyJet aircraft, perhaps because of its geographical position, perhaps because of a fairly affluent passenger catchment area, perhaps because of the conditions accorded by the airport management. This has led to a rapid expansion of the number of aircraft and flights, plus a very capable aircraft maintenance facility.

I suspect, however, that the desire to make more and more profits has resulted in a situation where the available resources, the scheduling of aircraft and the desire to have them flying for over 12 hours per day, have gone beyond what is realistic. This has then demonstrated the law of diminishing returns, whereby the resulting problems may actually outweigh the extra foreseen income, so that profitability may actually fall.

The current situation is that the reputation of easyJet, particularly easyJet Switzerland, is degrading rapidly. Unfortunately, as any business expert will agree, a reputation takes a long time to be established, but only a short time to be destroyed. In my opinion, the reputation of easyJet Switzerland and, by association, that of Geneva airport, is being destroyed this summer.

## **Introduction**

There are a number of events which have combined to make the author feel it necessary to write this critical analysis. One particular reason is the CRINEN process, instigated several years ago to study the possibility of introducing curfews more strict than the current regulations, in particular in order to protect the many people living around the airport from excessive early morning and/or late night news. Another reason is the current perception, widely reported in the media in Switzerland and the United Kingdom, that easyJet is becoming a notably bad performer in respect of punctuality of its flights and is having to cancel, or reroute, an alarmingly large number of flights. One which is important to Geneva residents is also that easyJet is the primary cause of a record number of flights landing at or taking off from Geneva airport after midnight.

Many of the detailed comments are based upon the use of the ARAG Geneva Aircraft Movement Enquiry (GAME) web-based utility to obtain detailed information on all aircraft movements at Geneva Airport. This has been operational for over two years, and the results are used to form various logical conclusions on what has really occurred at various times with particular aircraft.

Some comments, in particular on punctuality of flights, have also been obtained by an analysis of the data available on the web.

### **Significant complaints which have been reported in the Swiss media this summer**

The main trigger for the complaints was the widely reported case of a group of 44 young people from the Jura region of Switzerland, who had spent two years raising the money for a holiday in Majorca. They had booked on the flight EZS1515 on Monday, 12 July, scheduled to leave at 18h40. However, the aircraft to be used was the only Airbus A320 in the fleet of easyJet Switzerland, which was running very late after return trips to Porto and Lisbon (destinations which appear regularly in the delay statistics!). Therefore, if easyJet Switzerland had let the aircraft go to Majorca it would almost certainly have had to stay the night there! Perhaps because of that (there have been some conflicting stories on this) the flight was cancelled late that evening. After a night in a hotel quite a long way away, the young people got very upset with their treatment, or lack thereof, and alerted the media. As a result, they eventually got there by different routes, some only on the Wednesday.

This affair caught the attention of the Swiss Romande television, radio and press, triggering very many messages, especially via Facebook, of other people who had had problems with easyJet. It then emerged that a prominent Swiss politician had had bad experiences with the easyJet Switzerland flight from Berlin to Geneva. This flight has sometimes been so late as to be unable to get to Geneva before the closure, but has been known to leave Berlin late and then land at Lyon. Diversions of late easyJet flights to Lyon are not infrequent, with passengers then being transferred in the early hours of the morning from Lyon to Geneva by bus.

Unfortunately (for easyJet) it also turned out that a very well known Geneva lawyer had also had a bad experience with easyJet. Again, the aircraft concerned was the A320, on which he was flying to Ajaccio on the 19 June. This aircraft was only about an hour behind schedule when it left Geneva at around 13h15, but weather conditions around Ajaccio meant that it could not immediately land there. Instead of allowing the aircraft to wait, as did other airlines, the pilot was ordered to return to Geneva. The investigations of the lawyer then revealed that the aircraft would be needed for a flight to Marrakech, thus leading to the assumption that easyJet Switzerland effectively cancelled the Ajaccio landing (and return trip) in order to be sure that the aircraft could go to Marrakech and back the same day.

Besides the arguments on what was, or was not, reasonable, it seems rather clear that by having one different aircraft (the A320) able to carry a few more passengers than the remaining fleet of A319 aircraft, easyJet Switzerland has lost some flexibility. Note that the Marrakech route has been flown sometimes by A319. This lack of flexibility has again been seen on the 31 July, when the same aircraft, after returning on-time from Ajaccio, had to stay in Geneva for nearly three hours before leaving for Marrakech. This then meant that the return was (like the return from Malaga on the same night) diverted to Lyon.

These stories, and many others, may have been what prompted a state councillor from Zurich to request that the Swiss Civil Aviation Office verify whether the resources of easyJet Switzerland were adequate to assure the services for which they have been given an authorisation. This request will be transmitted later this summer.

Fairly shortly after all of this, the Swiss media picked up on the threat by Stelios Haji-Ioannou to remove the right of easyJet to use the name “easy” unless it could drastically improve the punctuality of its flights. Although the comparison with Air Zimbabwe was particularly emotive in the United Kingdom, the figures of only 48% of flights leaving Gatwick on time in June, as reported first in the Sunday Times, was repeatedly quoted.

There are numerous other unfavourable events (cancellations, diverted flights and ones with several hours of delay. I have documented a number of these in the blog that the local paper, the Tribune de Genève, invited me to write. This blog, normally in English, may be found at their Web site

<http://aviationanecdotes.blog.tdg.ch/easyjet-anecdotes/>

### **How does easyJet in Geneva compare to easyJet in Gatwick?**

The information allowing a comparison with easyJet UK, and in particular Gatwick airport, is extracted from the ARAG records of arrivals and departure times of all aircraft which used Geneva airport in 2009 and 2010. This data is then correlated with the published schedules for the movements, occasionally taking into account the fact that these schedules were subject to some relatively minor changes. In 2010 use has also been made of punctuality data extracted via the web site flightstats.com. According to this information during the Summers of 2009 and 2010, Geneva actually compares rather unfavourably with easyJet Gatwick.

For the Summer of 2009 ARAG analysed the delays for the final daily incoming flights of easyJet Switzerland, easyJet UK and the main regular commercial carriers.

According to the contents of the web Page

<http://www.flightontime.info/loco/airlines/ezy09.html>

in 2009 Geneva was arguably the worst overall destination for the punctuality of flights from the various UK airports.

It is also possible to obtain data via the web site of flightstats.com. These were referenced in the nightly news broadcast of the Swiss Romande national broadcasting system: this reference is included in a report of people who missed a return flight from Barcelona to Geneva because easyJet Switzerland advanced the departure time but did not make absolutely sure that all passengers had been made aware of the change. The archive of the news broadcast is available at the web address

<http://www.tsr.ch/video/info/journal-19h30/#id=2343074>

In the course of this emission, easyJet is cited as having the worst punctuality record: for easyJet UK the figure quoted was 42% of flights which are late, whereas for easyJet Switzerland the figure quoted was 49%.

Finally, an analysis of the information available on the flightstats.com web site concerning all of the easyJet Switzerland flights to and from Geneva in June, July and August has shown an even worse punctuality record.

In June, this analysis shows that of the flights which actually took place (i.e. not including the rather numerous cancelled flights), about 57% of all flights left from, or arrived at, Geneva

airport more than 15 minutes late. Perhaps worse is that over 18% of flights were over one hour late.

In July the figures are even worse, with approximately 63% of flights over 15 minutes late, and over 25% of flights more than one hour late.

### **Final remarks**

Essentially, the most appropriate remark would seem to be the title of my blog of Monday 16 August

**easyJet (Suisse) annulations, delays and diverted flights : ENOUGH IS ENOUGH**

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