

Alcohol and fitness to fly...

For my June PIREP (which will be my first ever) I tried to come up with something original to cater for my lack of PIREPS ever since the club started. And I think I've found something that can be both entertaining as well as educational.



It's a well known fact among pilots that alcohol and flying do not mix, hence the famous '8 hours between throttle and bottle' expression. But how bad is it to fly when you've had some drinks ?

I've put it to the test in this month's FOTM and discovered that it really is a bad idea to fly when you're intoxicated.

I broke out the Chivas Regal 12 years old Scotch Whisky and poured myself a glass during the cockpit preparation. What happened during the flight is a mix a of near misses and some amazed ATC faces.

What did you say Bill ? You recommend the 737-200 for this flight ? Pfff, why not a 747-400 ? Yep, you got it, the first glass of scotch is getting to my head and I start feeling a little invincible. So lets pull the mighty 747-400 out of the hangar, I'll bet I'll be able to fly this leg.

1 After one glass of Scotch...

Since at this point the scotch effects weren't noticeable everything went great. I punched all figures in the box and prepared the cockpit for start up and push back. This is all too easy I say to myself while pouring in a second glass.

[serious event 1]

'Christchurch ground, TC744 request push back'...'TC744, Christchurch ground, shouldn't you close those cargo doors before the push ?' Whow...did I forget to close those things ? Yep, I did actually ! Only a few minutes into the flight and already one serious event ! What's next ?

[serious event 2]

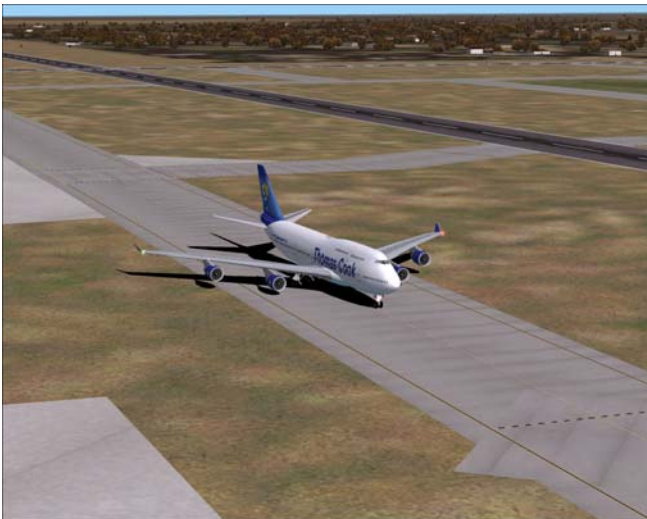
During the start up I forgot to turn on the anti collision beacon, too bad for that marshaller that got sucked into the number 1 engine...

[serious event 3]



In my eagerness and my nearly invincible mood I almost collided with a parked 737 on the ramp. I guess I expedited that taxi turn a little too much...

2 After a second glass of Scotch...



I found out that taxiing in the 747-400 is pretty easy, even when slightly intoxicated. Although the ground controller must have said something about my 'over the top' taxi speed but I can't really remember a radio call telling me to slow down. But more serious events were coming.

Normally it's standard practice to check brakes, flight instruments right at the beginning of the taxi. During the taxi flaps will be selected, along with autobrake RTO. The only thing I did was to select the autobrake RTO, the rest was omitted due to obvious reasons.

[serious event 4]

On the runway and after receiving the take off clearance I noticed that flaps weren't set for take off. Moreover, they weren't selected at all. Same goes for the landing lights, strobes and transponder. I pulled together all my pride and requested a short delay on the runway to get things back into flying shape. It was only from the outside view that I noticed that something was wrong. Of course the cockpit safety features would have advised me that take off wasn't to be started, but still...

Imagine that I took off without the 20° of flap...no more 747-400, no more plane to fly my 'round the world tour'...

Amazingly, the take off and climb out went really great. The automatic flight system did the job here, but still I was rather impressed that I was still able to get this thing up to cruise altitude. Time to drink that third glass !

3 After a third glass of Scotch...

Nothing much to report here. Like Bill said: the scenery in this part of the world is really beautiful although cruising at FL280 and .85 isn't exactly ideal for sight seeing. Come to think of it: .85 at FL280 is also very close to the 'red tape' on the airspeed indicator. A little faster and the overspeed warning would have sounded. This could have been a potential serious event number 5. Needless to say is that I arrived in Queenstown in a record time. Ground speeds of 495 knots were registered.



The approach and descent were pretty much like Bill described and they went without a hitch. To make it a little harder I poured in my fourth glass of Scotch.

4 After a fourth glass of Scotch...

Now I'm starting to feel really tipsy, just as the most challenging part of the approach is coming my way. This was going to be a true test of my flying skills. 'Be mindful of the terrain' I remember from Bill's description and so I did. Or didn't I?

[serious event 5]

Without fear I started descending through a cloud without a clue whatsoever of what terrain was lying beneath. When I broke out of the clouds, the GPWS was crying 'TERRAIN, TERRAIN...PULL UP PULL UP'. What's the big deal here? I've still got some 100 feet terrain clearance haven't I? A sharp look at the screenshot will reveal a 'PULL UP' warning just below the ADI and a GPWS warning below the primary flight display. Since at this time I was visual with the runway, I decided to continue the approach.



Landing this bird proved to be no biggie. Although the steep descent path provided me with some deceleration problems, but no big deal. The flaps were extended way below placard speeds and the gear was lowered at 190 knots, all standard.



As you can see from the screenshot, the landing was no major issue, little before the blocks, but I wanted to vacate asap because this narrow runway wouldn't allow me to turn and backtrack.

[serious event 6]

As you might have guessed...slowing down this bird to vacate at my intended exit point wasn't quite feasible. I had to continue to the end and try to turn it around. I soon found out that this was impossible without sucking debris into the engines and without 'swamping' my jumbo jet.

'Queenstown ground...TC744 we require some assistance...a tow truck would be nice.'

5 Conclusion

During this rather short flight I almost managed to crash the 747-400 two times, not taking into account the near ground collision with the 737 and the problem with the backtrack at Queenstown. After living the experience I can sum up some problems that will face you when trying to fly intoxicated:

1. fixation on less important issues
2. omission of important issues
3. 'Bold behaviour' causing narrow or absent safety margins