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FLIGHTS OF FANCY

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• Photo Gallery: Cathay Pacific Road Show SAN GABRIEL - Cathay Pacific Airways' first-class and business passengers are taking this one lying down.

The airline put its new fully-reclining seats and other updates on display Monday in its road show trailer at the Hilton Hotel as part of its tour through the U.S. and Canada.

The Hong Kong-based company has updated all three classes - first, business and economy - to keep up with industry standards and customer expectations.

"We want to continue to keep up with the competition and provide the best comfort for the customer," said Hugo Lai, director of marketing communications for Cathay Pacific in America. "This product is mainly designed for long-haul travel."

Many other airlines feature seats that recline completely flat or almost flat in first- and business-classes.

Two Cathay planes have been remodeled, and by spring 2008 all Los Angeles-to-Hong Kong planes should be updated, Lai said. There are 106 planes in the company's fleet.

"What Cathay has done recently has taken the initiative to push the envelope to a new level, and that will force other competitors to consider the same move in a very serious way," said Jahan **Alamzad**, president of CA Advisors, an aviation management consulting firm.

This is Cathay's first remodel of all three classes at once, Lai said. First-class seats were upgraded five years ago.

Alamzad said the move is part of a periodic upgrade all airlines do in order to stay competitive.

While Cathay's first-class seats already reclined into a bed, the new model is billed as the biggest bed in the sky. A mattress and duvet cover can be added to the seat as well, field support engineer Russell Tomkins said.

The first-class seats are dubbed suites because in addition to the main seat, a second surface can be used as either an ottoman or a seat for a visitor, which comes complete with a seat belt.

"Someone can sit there face to face with the other passenger," Tomkins said.

The ubiquitous overhead compartment has been removed from first-class seats. Instead, storage is found in one of the partitions of the module.

Because of the expansions of the first-class seating, Cathay decreased the number of first-class seats from 12 to nine, Lai said.

In business class, Cathay actually added seats because of the configuration. Like first class, the seats fully recline, come equipped with a massager and are contained by partitions.

"People love that it gives them privacy," said Vanessa Chan, a Cathay flight attendant at the road show.

She added that people also notice that all business seats have aisle access, which is accomplished through the design. The seats are arranged at an angle in a herringbone design, which means passengers don't have to climb over, or be climbed over, to get to the lavatory.

As in first-class, business-class seats also are equipped with noise-canceling headphones and a built-in ottoman.

"Premium class (first- and business-class) is the bread and butter for the airlines of the Pacific," **Alamzad** said. "For them, it makes a lot of sense to put huge emphasis on the service level to those travelers."

In economy class, the seats have been built so when passengers recline they aren't intruding on the passenger's space behind them. This is done through a fixed back, hard-shell design, so the bottom seat cushion of the person reclining moves forward. The seats also have a "live" back, which adds more comfort.

"It conforms to the shape of your back and gives additional support during the flight," Tomkins said.

Other features include adjustable headrests, a grounded power outlet and a personal TV screen with video-on-demand service.

The road show will be in the Spa at Equinox Century City on Wednesday and then travel to the airline's hubs, including San Jose, San Francisco, Toronto, New York City and Dallas.

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