



BA PLANE FIRE: PILOTS CONDEMN PASSENGERS WHO CARRIED BAGGAGE FROM BURNING AIRCRAFT

News / Airlines



After 170 people safely evacuated from a British [Airways jet](#) ablaze on the runway in Las Vegas, pilots lambasted passengers who insisted on carrying cabin baggage as they evacuated the plane.

A fire broke out in the port engine of the 26-year old Boeing 777-200 on the runway at McCarran airport. BA flight 2276 was departing from the Nevada city to Gatwick with 157 passengers and 13 crew on board.

The captain, Chris Henkey from Reading, brought the aircraft to a halt and ordered an evacuation using the aircraft's inflatable slides.

Still photographs and video footage shows a number of passengers running from the burning

plane with their cabin baggage, including wheeled suitcases, in breach of aviation law.

One of the passengers was Sid Langley, a retired journalist from Northamptonshire. He later posted on Facebook that he "did the right thing, grabbed wife and ran," while "other silly buggers fiddled around" retrieving hand luggage from overhead lockers.

In BA's pre-flight briefings, passengers are instructed in the event of an emergency evacuation "to move quickly to the nearest available exit, taking nothing with you".

Laurie Price, an aviation executive and private pilot, told The Independent: "Wheeled cases could easily have ripped the escape slides, rendering them unusable and prejudicing passengers' safe exit, whilst cases in the aisle make a confused situation even worse."

Captain Brendan O'Neal, chairman of the British Airline Pilots' Association (BALPA), praised the pilots and cabin crew but called on airlines and regulators to educate passengers on the danger of bringing hand baggage with them during an evacuation. He said: "Failing to follow the instructions of the crew by stopping to collect luggage is extremely dangerous."

Such passengers are also breaking the law. Civil Aviation Authority rules stipulate: "A person must not recklessly or negligently act in a manner likely to endanger an aircraft, or any person in an aircraft." Passengers must also obey the crew's commands.

Before an aircraft is certified for passenger use, the plane maker must demonstrate that a full payload of passengers and crew can evacuate within 90 seconds - but such tests are carried out with volunteers unencumbered by baggage. It helped that the BA aircraft at Las Vegas was little more than half-full, allowing all the passengers and crew to leave within a few minutes despite some exits being unusable because of fire.

The evacuation used lessons learned in the most recent BA fatal accident, which had a number of similarities. In August 1985, an engine fire broke out as a charter flight from Manchester to Corfu accelerated along the runway. Fifty-five of the 137 people on board died, mainly from smoke inhalation.

After the disaster, safety measures were imposed worldwide to increase survivability, and it is possible that some of the 170 people on board flight BA2276 owe their lives to those enhancements.

Over a dozen passengers were injured during the emergency evacuation. In a statement, British Airways said: "Customers who were taken to hospital have all been released following care and treatment. The National Transportation Safety Board [NTSB] in the U.S. conducting an investigation into the incident and we will give them our fullest support."

The aircraft manufacturer said in a statement: "Boeing is prepared to provide technical assistance to the NTSB following today's incident at McCarran Airport in Las Vegas."

As the investigation unfolds, it could lead to pressure to end the sale of duty-free spirits at airports and aboard aircraft. The official report into the Manchester disaster said it was "likely" that passengers' bottles of duty-free spirits accelerated the spread of fire through the cabin.

Passengers on the stricken jet at Las Vegas were provided with hotel rooms while alternative travel arrangements were made. The British Airways website said flight BA2276 was "delayed overnight," but insisted "all of our other flights are continuing to operate as normal". A Boeing 777 was flown from Heathrow to Gatwick to maintain the schedule.

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