



WOMEN IN AVIATION TAKE HAMBURG BY STORM

News / Airlines



There's a quiet revolution going on in Hamburg, where women in aviation are grouping together to showcase their achievements, inspiring the next generation of young people, and networking within their industry.

The group is called [Hamburg Aviation WoMen](#), and its recent exhibition is the hottest ticket in town. "Women Boosting Aviation", it's called, and following its public launch at Hamburg's City Hall in March to celebrate International Women's Day, it's already travelled to Airbus' Finkenwerder plant, Hamburg Airport's Terminal 2, Graz Airport in Austria, the Hamburg citystate Ministry of Economics, Transport and Innovation, MRO operation Lufthansa Technik, and the recent Hamburg Airport Days airshow, all by request of the institutions or companies concerned.

"The spark for the exhibition came directly out of our [Hamburg Aviation WoMen](#) working group," says Professor [Monika Bessenrodt-Weberpals](#), vice president of the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Hamburg Aviation Board member, and founding member of Hamburg Aviation WoMen. "In 2014, I had the idea of bringing an exhibition that shares our mission to the City Hall foyer of Hamburg for the International Women's Day. But in the end, we even created our own exhibition as a group, named 'Women boost aviation' and showing female career paths and networks from apprentice levels through university and job start all the way to the upper management level of aviation."

Part of that path for some young women is [Pro Technicale](#), an eleven-month course between school and university that helps young women prepare for academia by [developing technical abilities, workplace skills and professional networks](#). "ProTechnicale gives young women the

chance to gain technical expertise, get in contact with universities and companies and to set the course for their future,” explains Jörg Merlein, the program’s managing director.

One of Pro Technicale’s students is seventeen-year-old Elisabeth Fiederling, who is in this year’s cohort.

“My interests are very diverse,” Fiederling says, “so I decided that, rather than just pursue my original plan of studying medicine, I would first put my engineering/science side to the test at Pro Technicale after completing Abitur (the German high school diploma or A-levels). This programme is also giving me a lot of insights into aviation.

“In terms of flying itself, I have been a great fan ever since my first long-haul flight to North America. Furthermore, there have already been several engineers in my family, working in fields including aeronautical engineering. With this background, I am fascinated to discover whether there is an engineer’s heart beating in my breast, too.”

She adds, “The programme offers participants a lot of fantastic opportunities: Studying at university and vocational college, internships at home and abroad, and, last but not least, the valuable friendships that quickly develop from daily interaction with thirteen intelligent girls on the campus. We take part in lectures, tours and workshops and explore subjects covering aerospace engineering, renewable energy, philosophy, and personal development. This programme is ideal for fresh high school graduates, both as an orientation programme for academic study and for personal development.”

Later in their careers, too, women are finding benefit from networking, explains [Susanne von Arciszewski](#), former Head of A380 Cabin Assembly at Airbus, and another founding member of Hamburg Aviation WoMen, whose daughter Janine is following in her footsteps with a Master of Engineering degree and a position as a specialist team leader for manufacturing engineering in the single aisle structure assembly at Airbus.

“The Hamburg Aviation WoMen working group promotes networking and mutual support amongst students and those working in the industry, by providing the right platforms and networks. Those coming to the industry from a different field also receive additional support, helping them to quickly gain access to attractive career opportunities,” says von Arciszewski, who retired from Airbus late last year after finishing the cabin installation of Etihad’s landmark A380 cabins, but continues to remain active within the Hamburg aviation cluster, explains.

Business seats – A380 – Etihad launch event. Credit: John Walton

Formal and informal career exploration options are vital, says Lufthansa Technik production engineering aircraft mechanic Regina Ruehlmann, who is twenty-nine.

“As a child,” Ruehlmann remembers, “I wanted to be a gardener or a forest ranger. Later, a friend of mine did an apprenticeship as an aircraft mechanic at Lufthansa Technik, and his enthusiasm for this career path was contagious. The positive impressions were confirmed when I did a voluntary internship at Lufthansa Technik. My father was a shipbuilder and engineer, and I’m sure he passed some of his love of engineering on to me. Nevertheless, I still feel a very close bond with nature.”

Now, however, Ruehlmann and her team “repair aircraft structures and carry out structural modifications on our VIP aircraft. When we receive an aircraft, I start with a detailed examination, inspecting the machine, putting my findings together and working through them. Our customers

include, for example, NASA, the Federal German Air Force, royal families, and middle eastern sheikhs.”

“People notice you a little more quickly in this industry if you are a woman, of course,” Ruehlmann notes. “The advantages and disadvantages balance each other out, though. My personal development over the last few years has been very positive. I have acquired the licenses required for aviation engineering, attended the mastercraftsperson training school, been involved in apprenticeship programmes, and now I am taking responsibility for my own projects. So I have already climbed some of the smaller steps on the career ladder. There is still plenty of time for the bigger ones.”

With a dedicated and enthusiastic group of supporters in the [Hamburg Aviation WoMen working group](#) — so keen on aviation that they are just back from flying sailplanes in the skies near Hamburg — it’s clear that the future is bright for women in aviation in Hamburg.

Graduates of the Pro Technicale course. Credit: PT

