



Tim Clark

President of Emirates

Emirates' Tim Clark continues to go the distance to make the world a smaller place.

BY HOWARD SLUTSKEN

Rumors have been circulating of late that Tim Clark, president of Emirates, may be considering the “R” word: retirement. Not so, Clark says. “We’re lucky to have a strong management team in place with many potential candidates to take over when I choose to leave. However, for now, I’m still here and enjoying what I do.” Clark has shepherded Emirates since 1985, when he joined the nascent airline as head of Airline Planning. He’s been president since 2003, and led the airline’s remarkable growth from a single route into the mega-carrier it is today, with more than 150 destinations worldwide and more than 230 wide-body aircraft.

With a strategy of connecting travelers through the airline’s massive hub in Dubai, Emirates has focused its fleet on two aircraft types – the Airbus A380 and the Boeing 777. These wide-body aircraft are the cornerstone of the

airline’s global growth. “We’re able to connect city pairs, which may have in the past required multiple stops, such as Cairo to Auckland. Ultra long-range aircraft have made the world a smaller place,” Clark says. Emirates is the world’s largest operator of both the A380 and 777. It placed a 150-aircraft order for Boeing’s updated 777-8X and 777-9X in 2013, and



continues to bring new A380s into its fleet, which will soon have more than 100 of the supersized airplanes.

This year, Emirates received the World’s Best Inflight Entertainment award for the thirteenth consecutive time at the Skytrax World Airline Awards. “It’s an important element of our overall product, and we intend to continue investing in the latest technologies to offer our passengers the best entertainment,” he says. Emirates began investing in in-flight entertainment many years ago, and Clark recognizes that connectivity is becoming a key element of the passenger experience. “Internet connectivity has become a commodity. Customers expect it everywhere. It’s only going to improve, enabling higher speeds.” >

Emirates’ fleet is focused on two aircraft types: the 777 (left) and the A380 (above).





Clark is characteristically blunt when it comes to the criticism aimed at his decision to make the A380 the flagship of the airline, and his creation of an onboard shower spa for first-class passengers. "I'm not the slightest interested in what people think about what I do and don't do. In the end, I do it because it's the right thing to do, and my instinct was telling me to put showers in the dead area of the A380," he said in an interview with Skift. "If I had listened to everybody who told me it was nuts to do this, we would be [operating] four airplanes. The whole Emirates business model has been a complete destabilizer, a disruptor to the aviation world."

As far as Emirates having the lion's share of the worldwide fleet of A380s, Clark believes the aircraft is perfectly suited to handle the limitation of available

slots at major airports. At last November's World Travel Market, Clark said, "I try to argue very hard to all my competitors, if you want to challenge us, go buy the A380 – it's the best thing for you to do. But seriously, when you look at the constraints that we're all facing in this business, it has to be that. After all, the third runway at Heathrow, assuming it gets built, is [not until] 2026, if you're lucky. That's 10 years out. What are we going to do in the next 10 years?"

While Emirates has disrupted the traditional model of the long-distance carrier, Clark sees the industry in the throes of the next major disruption, driven by digital platforms, direct airline-to-passenger interaction and ancillary services. "Customers value different things. We want to allow them to customize their travel experience by purchasing directly through our own platforms. Some passengers may choose to buy a seat in business but don't want to pay for chauffeur-drive or lounge access. Others may want to travel in economy but want lounge access and fast-track at the airport. It's not one-size-fits-all anymore: We're unbundling our products to adopt an *à la carte* approach." >

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A first-class shower spa on board an Emirates A380.





Tim Clark at the opening of the Emirates lounge at Glasgow Airport in 2014 (left). Emirates' unveiled an updated lounge for the A380 this year (below).

Although Emirates has seen a huge reduction in profit this year, Clark is pragmatic about the impact of oil prices and the economic slowdown in the Gulf. "We've just got to tough it out," he said to the *Financial Times* in June. "The business model is essentially a sound business model, but at the moment it's challenged – for no reasons of our own, purely for geopolitical and socioeconomic reasons."

And while Clark plans to keep his focus on the future of the airline, he takes a moment to look back: "I've been with

Emirates since the very beginning. I have so many great memories; it would be difficult to pick one. From our first flight back in 1985 to our first A380 in 2008, the list of milestones is endless. I think that being part of the Emirates story and building one of the best airlines in the world is what I'm most proud of." ■

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Low-cost, long-haul carriers like Norwegian Air Shuttle, Scoot and AirAsia X are also having an impact on established airlines, something that Clark anticipated in the late 1990s. However, he's cautious about the success of that model, given the current state of global aeropolitics, and what he perceives as a move away from liberalism and multinational trade activities.

"If you get back into an aeropolitical framework, which is fairly predetermined in its thinking, then the likes of the low-cost, long-haul will fail, because they won't get the access that they need. But, believe me, with ... the price points I looked at all those years ago, using an A380 with 850 seats and an A340-600, it seemed to me that once you get into the incipient demand that will be tapped with these kind of price points, then it would suddenly explode," he said at the World Travel Market.

Tim Clark will be receiving the CEO Lifetime Achievement Award at APEX EXPO in Long Beach, California, this year.



PHOTOS: EMIRATES