

Would you fly with that airline?

SAA's new 'fast track' pilot training scheme

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SOUTH AFRICAN Airways is on the brink of introducing a radical new pilot training programme which will see trainees taking their place as co-pilots after the equivalent of just three days actual flying.

The bulk of the training will take place in advanced flight simulators, which has allowed trainers to slash actual flying hours in a real aircraft by more than half. The cost-cutting initiative is part of efforts by the

national carrier to introduce more blacks to its pilot ranks.

Called a Multi-Crew Pilot Licence (MPL), the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) is currently drawing up standards and regulations for the programme that could be ready in mid-2007, according to Captain Colin Jordaan, general manager of SAA's flight operations.

Pilot associations around the world, including the Airline Pilots Association of South Africa (Alpa-SA), do not sup-

port the MPL, and say the safety of passengers will be compromised.

Alpa-SA president Harvey van Rooyen said there was "no way you can simulate exactly what goes on in the real world". The organisation would next month be taking its concerns about the programme to the government.

Jordaan said in an interview this week that the initiative would fast-track the number of black pilots employed by the national carrier. At present,

the airline employs just 66 black men and women pilots out of a total of 796.

SAA's target, introduced in 1996, was to have 300 black pilots by last year.

SAA nevertheless appears to lead the way among local airlines in terms of the number of black pilots.

Comair, which declined to comment on its efforts to employ a more representative spread of pilots, has just three black pilots, one of whom is a cadet.

slammed by aviation bodies

Jordaan said the new type of licence would be "a heck of a lot cheaper" to implement than the airline's cadet school, which costs SAA R750 000 per person for the 18-month course.

He said budgetary constraints allowed SAA to train an average of just 16 cadets per course. Under the new MPL programme, more than double this number were likely to be trained.

"We will be able to take a person off the street and start training them in our simula-

tors for between 12 and 18 months and they will then be able to move into the right-hand seat of a Boeing 747 as co-pilot," Jordaan said.

MPL graduates will only be able to fly in a "multi-crew environment" for the first few years and SAA saw the programme as a good opportunity to "mould" trainees in the airline operations.

But opposition to the plan has been widespread, with organisations including the European Cockpit Association,

representing 29 professional pilots' associations, saying that the MPL risks downgrading the standards of commercial flight training.

Van Rooyen said Alpa-SA was concerned that, while simulations were useful, bad weather patterns such as thunderstorms could not be simulated.

Currently, cadets trained for about six years, several of these being in-service training at one of SAA's feeder airlines, before becoming first officers.

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