

BOEING STRATOCRUISER

by Peter Berry MRAeS

In January 2003, BBC TV Scotland, was preparing a six-part programme, "Weather Permitting," to illustrate the many variables in weather that affect our lives. The author was asked to research the B.O.A.C. Boeing 377 Stratocruiser and in particular, the accident which took place at Prestwick Airport, Scotland, in the early hours of Christmas Day, 1954, to G-ALSA/# 15943, "Cathay." In researching this event, the opportunity was taken to bring the "Stratocruiser" file up-to-date. These items are noted here.

Number Built : 888, including 56 civil versions. The rest were C-97 military transports and air-refuelling tankers.

Civil:	One prototype and 55 production.	
PanAm:	Twenty plus the prototype	21
SILA (Sweden):	Four, to BOAC before delivery	4
BOAC:	Six	6
Northwest:	Ten	10
American Overseas:	Eight, later to PanAm	8
United Air Lines:	Seven, later six, to BOAC	7
Total:	Fifty-six	56

BOAC Stratocruisers Delivered and in Service

The first Boeing Stratocruiser to be delivered to BOAC was G-ALSA "Cathay," which arrived at London/Heathrow on October 28, 1949, after a non-stop flight from New York, cruising at 25,000 feet at 350 mph.

The BOAC inaugural flight from London to New York, via Prestwick, using "Cathay," commenced on December 6, 1949, landing at Idlewild Airport, New York, the next morning.

Weekly services were continued until the following month, when twice-weekly services were introduced and by the end of February, with eight Stratocruisers delivered, a daily service was operated. The last of the ten BOAC Stratocruisers was delivered at the end of March 1950.

Brief Listing of the "lives" of the 56 civil Stratocruisers;

#15922: NX90700, Boeing - N1022V, PanAm - Boeing 1961 - YV-C-ERI, RANSA. Cut up July 1969.
#15923 : NX1023V, PanAm - June 2, 1958, written off in a "heavy" landing during a rainstorm at Manila. Two casualties, 46 passengers and 8 crew safe. Dismantled.
#15924: NX1024V, Boeing - N1024V, PanAm - Boeing, 1961 - Aero Spacelines, 1961 for "Pregnant Guppy" conversion, with P&W R-4360 engines - ff. September 19, 1962 - N126AJ, American Jet 1970s. Broken up for spares.
#15925: N1025 V, PanAm - 4X-FOF/ASA/FPW, Israel 1962.
#15926: N1026V, PanAm - Boeing 1961 - To RANSA 1961. Scrapped February 1969 - Parts to Israel.

#15927: N1027V, PanAm - To G-ANUM, BOAC 1954 - West African Airways, March 1958 - N1027V/N401Q, Transocean 1958 - Aero Spacelines for spares.
#15928: N1028V, PanAm - Boeing 1961 - YV-C-ERJ, RANSA 1961 - Scrapped 1969.
#15929: N1029V, PanAm - April 30, 1952. Left landing gear collapsed, landing London from Frankfurt - 26 passengers and 9 crew safe Repaired - Boeing 1961 - RANSA 1961-Scrapped 1968.
#15930: N1030V, PanAm - July 27, 1952, passenger fell from aircraft, when door opened in flight - 4X-AOH/FPV, Israel 1962.
#15931: N1031V, PanAm- December 21, 1949, fire in No. 1 engine. Emergency descent from 23,000 feet and safe landing at New York. 41 passengers and 11 crew safe. February 11, 1950, door opened over Long Island, steward lost (!) - Boeing 1961 - YV-C-ERH, RANSA. Scrapped 1969.
#15932: N1032V, PanAm - March 26, 1955, ditched off the Oregon Coast, 42 minutes out of Seattle, experienced runaway propeller on No.3 engine. Four lost, one injured, 18 saved.
#15933: N1033V, PanAm -April 10, 1959. Pilot undershot landing at Alaska/ Juneau, hit embankment and burned. Five passengers and five crew safe.
#15934: N1034V, PanAm - YV-C-ERK, RANSA 1961 - Scrapped 1969.
#15935: N1035V, PanAm - March 6, 1954, damaged landing at New York with jammed nose-wheel. 53 passengers and 10 crew safe - December 12, 1957, landing gear damaged by fire, after two aborted take-off attempts from New York. 31 passengers and 6 crew safe- Boeing 1961 - RANSA 1961- Scrapped 1968.
#15936: N1036V, PanAm - March 1, 1951. After a flight from Hurn to London, landing gear raised instead of flaps. Major damage to wing and nacelles of Nos. 3 & 4 engines. Crew safe. May 30, 1956, damaged again on after belly landing at New York after a training flight. Repaired - YV-C-ERL, RANSA 1961. Scrapped 1968.
#15937: N1037V, PanAm - Boeing 1960 - Aero Spacelines 1963, for conversion to “Mini-Guppy” with P&W R-4360 engines, ff. May 24, 1967 - N22AJ, American Jet - N422AU, Aero Union - Erikson Air Crane - Preserved at Tillamook, Oregon.
#15938: N1038V, PanAm - Boeing 1960 - Aero Spacelines, for conversion to “Super Guppy,” with T34-P turboprops and parts from the YC-97J, ff. August 31, 1965 - N940NS, NASM - Preserved Pima Air Museum, Tucson, Arizona 1995.
#15939: N1039V, PanAm - April 29, 1952. Crashed in the Brazil Jungle. 41 passengers and 9 crew lost- “Separation of No.2 engine and propeller in flight.”
#15940: N1040V, PanAm - Boeing 1960 - HC-AGA/AFS of LIA - Seized by Government of Ecuador - Stored 1965.

#15941: N1041V, PanAm - Stored 1960. Scrapped 1966, parts to RANSA and Israel.
#15942: N1042V, PanAm, - April 5, 1950, left landing gear collapsed and ground loop, landing at SFO. Repaired - Boeing 1961- Aero Spacelines, Broken up.
#15943: SE-DDP, SILA - G-ALSA, BOAC "Cathy"- December 6, 1949, first BOAC Stratocruiser service, London-Prestwick-New York. February 27, 1954, damaged in heavy landing Iceland/Keflavik. 42 passengers and crew safe. Repaired - December 25, 1954, crashed after GCA approach at Prestwick. 28 passengers and crew lost.
#15944: OY-DFY, SILA - G-ALSB, BOAC "Champion" - N408Q, Transocean 1959 - Aero Spacelines for spares for "Super Guppy."
#15945: LN-LAF, SILA - G-ALSC, BOAC "Centaurus"- November 13, 1958, operated last scheduled service, London to New York - N101Q/N406Q, Transocean 1959 - Aero Spacelines. Parts used for "Super Guppy."
#15946: SE-BDR, SILA - G-ALSD, BOAC "Cassiopeia" - N85Q/N403Q, Transocean 1958 - Aero Spacelines 1963. Spares.
#15947: N74601, Northwest - August 5, 1955, damaged after over-running runway at Chicago/O'Hare, when propellers failed to reverse on landing. No injuries. Repaired - Lockheed 1959 - Aero Spacelines for "Mini-Guppy".
#15948: N74602, Northwest - Lockheed 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963.
#15949: N74603, Northwest - Lockheed 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963.
#15950: N74604, Northwest - Lockheed 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963.
#15951: N74605, Northwest - Lockheed 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963.
#15952: N74606, Northwest - Lockheed 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963.
#15953: N74607, Northwest - August 14, 1959. During the pre-flight check, oxygen bottle exploded. Passengers escaped by slides - Sold to insurers - RANSA. Scrapped 1968.
#15954: N74608, Northwest - January 25, 1950, lost a engine from a wing, landed safely at Chicago/Midway - April 2, 1956, ditched in Puget Sound after take-off from Seattle, following severe buffeting and losing control. Five lives lost.
#15955 - N74609, Northwest - Lockheed 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963.
#15956: N74610, Northwest - Lockheed 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963.
15957: N90941, American Overseas - PanAm, September 1950 - July 9, 1959, Written off after belly-landing at Tokyo. 53 passengers and 6 crew safe.
#15958: N90942, American Overseas - PanAm, September 1950 - Boeing 1961 - Aero Spacelines-broke up.

#15959: N90943, American Overseas - August 10, 1950, nose-wheel collapsed, landing at New York from a training flight. No casualties - PanAm, September 1950 - October, 16, 1956, en-route Honolulu to San Francisco, experienced loss of two engines and a runway propeller. Circed the U.S. Coast Guard Weather Ship, "Pontchartrain" at 30N145W, some 1,150 miles SW of SFO, for three hours awaiting dawn. Capt. Richard Ogg, ditched in the Pacific Ocean at 08:16. The tail section broke off, but all 37 passengers and crew were rescued within 13 minutes. The aircraft sank while being towed, 21 minutes later.

#15960: N90944, American Overseas - PanAm, September 1950 - November 9, 1957, disappeared in the Pacific Ocean, en-route SFO to Hawaii. Last report 1,000 miles East of Honolulu. Cause unknown. Charred wreckage found. 44 lives lost. 15 bodies recovered.

#15961: N90945, American Overseas - PanAm, September 1950 - Boeing 1961 - RANSA - Scrapped, April 1968 - Parts to Israel.

#15962: N90946, American Overseas - PanAm, September 1950 - Stored SFO 1961 - 4X- AOG/FOD/FPZ, Israel 1962.

#15963: N90947, American Overseas - PanAm, September 1950 - June 17, 1951, damaged, landing short at Guam Island, No injuries to 14 passengers and 9 crew. May 17, 1957, en-route Honolulu to Tokyo, damaged in emergency landing at Johnson Island, due propeller blade failure, which tore No.4 engine from its mounting. Repaired - Stored SFO 1961 - 4X-FOD/FOG/FPX, Israel 1962.

#15964: N90948, American Overseas - PanAm, September 1950 - Stored SFO 1961 - 4X-FOI/FPY, Israel 1962. VIP interior.

#15965: N31225, United Airlines - G-ANTX, BOAC, "Cleopatra," December 1954 - "Coronet" 81 - seat tourist service on NAT - Ghana Airways 1959 - N107Q/N412Q, Transocean, July 1959 - Aero Spacelines - Scrapped 1964.

#15966: N31226, United Airlines - G-ANTY, BOAC, "Coriolanus," October 1954 - "Coronet" service - March 19, 1959, shed propeller after take-off, Accra, returned safely - N108Q/N413Q, Transocean, July 1959 - Aero Spacelines - Scrapped.

#15967: N31227, United Airlines - G-ANTZ, BOAC, "Cordelia," December 1954 - "Coronet" service - Ghana Airways, July 1958 - Nigerian Airways - N106Q/N411Q, Transocean, 1959 - Aero Spacelines - cut up, with parts to N1037V.

#15968: N31228, United Airlines - G-ANUA, BOAC, "Cameronian," December 1954 - Nigerian Airways 1959 - N109Q/N414Q, Transocean, August 1959 - Aero Spacelines, 1963.

#15969: N31299, United Airlines - G-ANUB, BOAC, "Calypso," September 1954 - West African Airways 1957 - Ghana Airways 1959 - Flown to Stansted and broken up, January 1960.

#15970: N31230, United Airlines - September 12, 1951 crashed into SFO Bay during a training flight. Three crew lost. "Inadvertent stall at low altitude, with one engine feathered."
#15971: N31231, United Airlines - G-ANUC, BOAC, "Clio," November 1954 - Nigerian Airways 1958 - Flown to Stansted August 1960 and broken up.
#15974: G-AKGH, BOAC, "Caledonia," christened at Prestwick, July 1, 1950 - N137A/N402Q, Transocean 1958 - Aero Spacelines 1963, scrapped.
#15975: G-AKGI, BOAC, "Caribou" - West African Airways 1957 - N100Q/N405Q, Transocean January 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963.
#15976: G-AKGJ, BOAC, "Cambria" - N102Q/N407Q, Transocean 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963, parts to N1024V.
#15977: G-AKGK, BOAC, "Canopus" - Ghana Airways 1958 - N104Q/N409Q, Transocean 1959 - Aero Spacelines, scrapped.
#15978: G-AKGL, BOAC, "Cabot" - April 24, 1951, at 8:27, Landed heavily on nose wheel at Prestwick. Nose wheel torn off, damage to lower nose compartment and all four propellers. No casualties. Repaired on site, back to the wing trailing edge - N86Q/N404Q, Transocean, September 1958 - N9600H, Aero Spacelines. Stored.
#15979: G-AKGM, BOAC, "Castor" - December 25, 1957, en-route to North America, suffered a engine fire, after the loss of No.4 propeller. An adjacent Stratocruiser captain, talked the pilot through his descent and the flight made a successful emergency landing at Sydney, Nova Scotia. All safe - N105Q/N410Q, Transocean, March 1959 - Aero Spacelines 1963, scrapped.

Remaining Stratocruisers.

Two civil Stratocruisers have been preserved,

#15937: N1037V, PanAm - Boeing 1960. Aero Spacelines 1963, to "Mini-Guppy" 1967- N422AJ, America Jet Industries - N422AU, America Air Crane - Preserved at Tillamook, Oregon 1995.
#15938: N1038V, PanAm - Boeing 1960. Aero Spacelines, for conversion to "Super Guppy" - N940NS, NASM - Preserved at the Pima Air Museum, Tucson, Arizona, 1995.

In addition to the three civil "Guppy" conversions noted above, #15924, N1024V, "Pregnant Guppy," #15937, N1037V/N422AU, "Mini Guppy" and #15938, N1038V/ N940NS, "Super Guppy," there were five further conversions for the "Super Guppy" programme, all of these were based on military C-97 transports. Four were operated by Aeromaritime under contract to Airbus, the last one being sold to NASA;

#000 1 - N111AS - Aero Spacelines, converted with Allison 501, turboprop engines, ff. March 13, 1970. Crashed after take-off, Mojave, May 12, 1970.
#00 1: N211AS - Aero Spacelines, converted with Allison 50 1, turboprop engines, ff. Aug 24, 1970 - F-BTGV, Airbus Industries, Nov. 1971. Operated by Aeoromartime, Airbus Skylink, “ 1”. 14,065 flying hours to Dec 31, 1994. On display at Bruntingthorpe, England 1996.
#002: N212AS - Aero Spacelines, converted with Allison 501 turbo-prop engines, ff. Aug 24, 1972 - F- BPPA, Airbus Industries Aug. 1973. Painted “Super Guppy”, with Town of Bremen shield. Airbus Skylink “2”. 13,482 hours to Dec. 31, 1994. On display at Airbus, Toulouse.
#003: F-WDSG - Built from an unknown C-97G by UTA Industries at Le Bourget. Converted with Allison 501 turboprop engines, ff. July 1, 1982 - F-WSDG, Airbus Skylink “3’, then F-GSDG. 8,248 hours at Dec 31, 1994. Stored at Airbus, Hamburg.
#004: F-WEAI - Built from an unknown C-97G by UTA Industries at Le Bourget. Converted with Allison 501 turboprop engines, ff. June 21, 1983 - F-WEAL then F-GEAI, Airbus Skylink, “4”. Registered N941NA October 17, 1997, to NASA.

The Israel Air Force also used a fleet of civil B377 Stratocruisers and military C-97s;

#15925 - N1025V - 4X-FPW - Swing tail. #15930 - N1030V - 4X-FPV - Swing tail #15962 - N90946 - 4X-FPZ - Swing tail. #15963 - N90947 - 4X-FPX #15964 - N90948 - 4X-FPY - VIP interior.
#16455 - AF51-0378 - 4X-FPU #16658 - AF52-2627 - 4X-FPS - Two-point tanker. #16643 - AF52-2612 - 4X-FPT #16645 - AF52-2614 - 4X-FPP - Three-point tanker. #16654 - AF52-2623 - 4X-FPW #16714 - AF52-2683 - 4X-FPR #16767 - AF52-2736 - 4X-FPN- Displayed at the Israel AFM, Hatzerim AFB, Beersheba. #16830 - AF52-2799 - 4X-FPO - Three-point tanker. #17147 - AF53-0365 - 4X-FPM

Ref;

AAHS V9-3/229, Fall 1964, Transocean Stratocruisers

AAHS V14-4/217, Winter 1969, Stratocruisers -Part One

AAHS V 15-1/33, Spring 1970, Stratocruisers - Part Two

AAHS V30-3/307, Winter 1985, Israel Air Force Stratocruisers

Propliner, Nos. 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, Winter 1998, Stratocruiser. Parts One to Six

Authors notes and photographs except where noted.

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Above: Boeing 377 prototype (Photo courtesy of Boeing Historical Archives)

Below: Boeing 377 BOAC G-ALSA (#15943) at London Airport, 1954 -(Photo: BOAC #5828 via Petter Berry)



Above: Transocean B377 N401Q at Prestwick 1959 (Photo: Goodon Macadie via Peter Berry)



Above: Boeing 377 #15977 BOAC G-AKGK at Prestwick circa 1956 (Photo: Goodon Macadie via Peter Berry)

Below: Boeing 377 # 15925 PanAM N1025V over San Francisco (Photo courtesy of Boeing Historical Archives)



Below: "Supper Guppy" lifting off from Long Beach Airport after the delivery of DC-10 fuselage barrel assembly to McDonnell-Douglas (Photo courtesy of Boeing Historical Archives)

