

MiMa by Eurofly: *Italian High Society*

by Luigi Vallero



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Eurofly's A319-115LR, registered I-ECJA, was delivered in May 2005 and first dry-leased to Saudi Arabian-based NAS, awaiting the authorizations to start scheduled services from Milan to New York.

A number of airline companies have made a success of catering to the individual travel and service needs of their exclusive clientele. PrivatAir (Airways, September 2005), the experimental Gulf Air flights operated in 2003 by RoyalJet between Abu Dhabi (Abū Zaby) and Geneva (Genève), and more recent USA-based examples such as Eos Airlines (News from the Airways, December 2005) and MAXjet Airways (News from the Airways, October 2005 & January 2006) are a few examples. More recently, in the lucrative northern Italian market, discerning and affluent passengers have been provided with a more exclusive way of flying the North Atlantic.

Most of those services offered by the major European airlines have been operated on an ACMI (Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance & Insurance) basis, with the smaller operating carrier flying on behalf of the larger company, which in turn absorbs the commercial risk of the operation. Now, Eurofly—Italy's premier holiday carrier and fourth largest airline in the country—has taken the bold step of teaming up with the Milano Manhattan Club (MiMa Club) to establish a 'top-shelf' service between Milan [Milano]-Linate and New York, while also being responsible for marketing the product.

The idea came to Eurofly's CEO, Capt Augusto Angioletti, in 2003. Two years later, in May 2005, his brainchild materialized in the form of a brand-new Airbus A319-115LR (A319 Corporate Jet)—with the capability for North Atlantic ETOPS (Extended-Range Twin-Engine Operations)—that features several differences from its

siblings. With a cabin layout for only 48 passengers, the airplane is fitted with the ultimate in luxurious seats, from Recaro. Reclining to an almost flat angle of 12°, the seats have a pitch of 147cm (58in). They ensure maximum privacy through ingeniously designed, in-armrest tray tables which double as partitions.

Onboard meals are exclusively designed and catered for the MiMa flights, and cabin attendants employed on these services are specially trained at the Scuola Alberghiera di Stresa. A recently signed sponsorship with Campari—which extends to a big red 'billboard' displayed across both sides of the A319CJ's fuselage—means that passengers can enjoy complimentary exclusive cocktails created from this world-famous liquor.

Check-in times are only 30 minutes before departure, eliminating the time wasted on the ground when flying on other scheduled commercial services.



PHOTOS: EUROFLY

MiMa by Eurofly

The MiMa Club was created by Marco Gualtieri for the benefit of entrepreneurs, managers, professionals, and intellectuals who regularly commute between Milan and New York. Espousing a vision of developing ‘networking opportunities’ between people who share the same ambitions and expectations, the club aims to stimulate cultural and commercial exchanges between the business communities in Italy and the USA. To this end, MiMa originally offered members a variety of amenities, ranging from a 24-hour concierge service—whereby onward airport travel by limousine, helicopter, or private jet can be organized—to customized travel arrangements. The logical extension of this pampering was provision of flights, available to club members only, connecting the two cities. This idea perfectly suited the Eurofly initiative.

Change of Plan

Apart from the exclusivity of flying in an all-business class aircraft, the original plan envisaged by MiMa and Eurofly provided for the service to operate from Milan’s downtown Linate Airport. This was deemed preferable to the city’s major airport, Malpensa (*Airways*, January 2001), which is used by many international services, but involves a 48km (30mi) road journey between the city, along an often very busy highway.

Linate, however, is located only 8km (5mi) from the city, and still perceived by the travelling public as Milan’s premium airport, despite being slot-restricted and inaccessible for new air services. Moreover, to add to the sense of exclusivity, MiMa services were planned to leave from Linate’s general aviation terminal.

Unfortunately the idea was not well received by established carriers such as Alitalia, Delta, and Continental, all of which offer traditional wide-body, two-class services from MXP to New York (both EWR and JFK), and thus foresaw the potential threat to their high-yield revenue. Because North American carriers, in particular, are not allowed to code-share on connecting services into Linate, not surprisingly they objected to the US DOT (Department of Transportation) on the basis that the Linate service would have violated the reciprocity rights as they were not allowed to use that airport.

The situation became a nightmare for Eurofly as May 8, 2006—the first day of planned operations—approached. In fact, the inaugural service was cancelled with 24 hours’ notice as US authorities had not sanctioned the flight, and booked passengers were transferred to other carriers. During the ensuing hectic weeks, a solution had to be



found, and finally—and reluctantly—the service was rescheduled out of Malpensa’s Terminal 2, whence most Milan-departing Eurofly flights are operated. Thus, there was direct competition with the major carriers, even though the latter use the newer Terminal 1. Eventually, the rescheduled inaugural flight took place on May 29, 2006; service continues on a Monday-to-Friday basis.

Flights are timed to leave MXP at 1700—so as to allow a full business day in Milan—reaching JFK at 2020—in time for a good night’s sleep while minimizing the effects of jetlag. Eastbound flights depart JFK at 2150, again facilitating a whole day in New York, arriving at MXP at 1215, leaving the afternoon free for business or recreation.

During the peak northern summer season, when business traffic demand slows, frequency is reduced to thrice-weekly (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays). On other days the A319 flies luxury charter services to Hamilton, in Bermuda, and Mombasa (Kenya).

Originally, only MiMa members had access to the service, but the flights are now available through the major GDS (Global Distribution Service) systems with promotional fares that start at €1,999 (\$2,540) return. Full fares peak at €1,900 (\$2,400) one-way.

Whether Eurofly and MiMa will succeed in attracting the market’s upper echelons away from the regular airlines is still unknown. However, the advantages are undeniable: the exclusiveness of being on seemingly your very own flight; ideally timed schedules; attention to detail both on the ground and in the air; excellent food and wines; and concierge services. None of these perks are currently offered by any of the competition.

On the basis of this service concept, Eurofly is poised to attain greater heights as one of very few carriers providing high-quality service, further enhancing the company’s image as an ambassador of Italian style and good taste to the world. ➔

(Airways thanks Massimo Faleschini, business development manager for Eurofly, and Claudia Spreafico, of Gruppo Santagostino PR, for their invaluable help.)

Flying with Eurofly/MiMa Club

Flight: GJ900

Sector: Milano-Malpensa (MXP) to
New York (JFK)

Flight: GJ900

Equipment: Airbus A319-100LR

I was contacted by the MiMa's 'Care Center' three weeks before departure date; upon providing my credit card details, I was immediately issued with an electronic 'invitation' letter, denoting my PNR (passenger name record), flight details, and clear instructions for reaching the Sala Puccini, at Malpensa's T2, where I could collect my tickets.

When I called a few days before departure, to check for any possible changes, everything was confirmed and I was offered a transfer from T1, where my connecting flight would arrive, to T2—which I gladly accepted. Terminal 2, Malpensa's older terminal located 3km (2mi) to the north of T1, is now used almost exclusively by charter flights.

The day before departure an email message from the Care Center requested my passport details in order to speed up airport procedures. I was also pleased that my request for information about cabin luggage allowable onboard (I was travelling the day after the UK/USA bomb plots were averted last August) was answered with a very detailed response within half an hour.

On the day of travel, my connecting flight landed at MXP's T1 after a delay of more than 50 minutes. I started to worry when it took another 40 minutes for my check-in luggage to appear on the carousel—unfortunately quite a common experience at this airport. My original connecting time had been cut from three hours to slightly more than 90 minutes, so I called the Care Center. A courteous Cristina told me they already knew my inbound flight was late, and had therefore rearranged my pickup to T2. After a short wait, when I was eventually clear of T1, my transfer materialized and I was whisked to T2, while Cristina had, meanwhile, called me back on my mobile phone to ensure that everything was running as expected.

I was finally at the right place by 1540, with 1hr 20min to go before departure, having followed the clear signage to easily locate the Sala Puccini, a very pleasant oasis of tranquillity, where MiMa passengers can relax on comfortable sofas while checking-in. A friendly staff comprising three concierges, including Cristina, awaited passengers; I was greeted as a familiar and valued guest, and my tickets were handed to me. Check-in was smooth—including replying to the customary questions for USA-bound passengers—and I was soon handed my



boarding card and an invitation to the pleasant lounge, jointly hosted by Livingston and Eurofly, located right in front of Gate E23, where the Airbus A319CJ operating flight GJ900 was docked.

The boarding call was made at 1645, and very quickly the nine passengers were onboard, warmly welcomed by a female flight attendant wearing Eurofly's stylishly-tailored, red-and-gray uniform. There were four flight attendants, three young women and a male—all of pleasant demeanour—for this flight.

Upon entering the cabin, I had the impression of being on a private jet. The attractive decor, all in soft brown tones—from the thick carpets on the floor to the seat fabric and leather-lined 'shells'—gives a pleasant sensation of warmth and relaxation. Italian designer Alviero Martini has done a good job of selecting the pattern of the velvety seat fabric, featuring his signature 'old-world five continents map' theme depicted in murals at both forward and aft ends of the cabin.

Seating is arranged 2-2, and I was soon comfortably settled in my Recaro window 'armchair', having the whole row—in fact, almost the entire aircraft—to myself.

The IFE (in-flight entertainment) system boasts 16:9 ratio widescreen monitors, AVOD (Audio Video On Demand), a choice of eight movies, 12 video games, and a wide selection of music CDs, enabling passengers to compile their own selections. SMS messages as well as short emails can also be sent in flight.

As soon as we were seated, and jackets collected, a welcome drink of Italian Prosecco, juice, or water was offered. A number of financial and news publications, along with Eurofly's in-flight magazine, were available in the little 'library' in the shell holding the seat pair in front of mine. But two flight attendants soon wheeled a trolley through the cabin, offering an even wider selection of Italian and international newspapers and magazines.

Eurofly was established in Turin [Torino] in December 1978 as Eurofly Service with a Cessna Citation to provide transport for three Italian industrial groups: Olivetti, industrial manufacturer Valla, and clothing manufacturer FATA. From September 1, 1980, outside executive charters were offered through Europe and the Mediterranean area.

On May 26, 1989, Eurofly was formed after the original company was acquired and reorganized by Alitalia (with a 45% shareholding), Olivetti (45%), and San Paolo Finance (10%), as a charter arm of the Italian flag-carrier. Operations began on February 26, 1990, with two second-hand Douglas DC-9-51s, with service on the Malpensa–Gerona (Spain)–Rome [Roma]–Gerona–Malpensa route on behalf of Ford Italia.

Two years later Eurofly entered the then-new Red Sea resorts market, offering the first regular charter services between Italy and Sharm-el-Sheikh. Separately, new medium-haul routes were added, operating on a regular basis, while the fleet was gradually increased with the addition of McDonnell Douglas MD-83s.

Between 1998 and 1999, with the introduction of Boeing 767-300ERs, Eurofly added long-haul services to the major leisure destinations of México, Cuba, Guadeloupe, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Cabo Verde, and Kenya.

The following year Alitalia took complete control of Eurofly, reflected in the original light blue-and-green livery being superseded by a green cheatline, with the parent company's 'A' logo emblazoned on the tail; only the red Eurofly titles indicated a different identity. Meanwhile, a decision to renew the fleet was taken, and an all-Airbus option was the result. The first new A320s arrived in 2001, with delivery of A330-200s from 2002. A number of regular long-haul charter routes were upgraded to scheduled service.

Volare failed in a bid to acquire Eurofly in 2002, but the following year the apparently settled situation with Alitalia suddenly changed when an 80% stake was sold to the Spinnaker Group, a Luxembourg-based equity fund. On July 9, 2004, the remaining 20% also changed hands. As an autonomous entity, Eurofly faced a difficult transition and overnight became a major rival of its former parent.

To eliminate the Alitalia-esque image, in autumn 2004 an elegant three-tone gray design, as well as a dynamic red 'e' logo, was introduced, along with new cabin interiors and stylish Italian-designed uniforms. To underscore the importance to Eurofly of the Red Sea market, an operational base was opened in Sharm-el-Sheikh with two A320s.

Always innovative, in 2005 seasonal scheduled service began between New York-JFK and the secondary Italian airports of Bologna, Naples [Napoli], and Palermo. The initiative proved successful, and was repeated in 2006. In addition, Eurofly has added Rome [Roma] as a destination from JFK. Looking east as well as west, Eurofly has been designated as an official operator for flights to Russia, and is now regularly linking Naples with Moscow [Moskva]. →



Eurofly

IATA: GJ **ICAO:** EEZ **IATA/ARC:** 736 **Radio:** *Siriofly*

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CEO: Capt Augusto Angioletti

Ownership: Spinnaker Luxembourg (44.167%); Singins (5.188%); Banca Profilo (2.818%); ARCA SGR (3.269%); Bipiemme Gestioni SGR (2.699%); others (41.859%)

Destinations served: Ancona, Bari, Catania, Bologna, Brescia, Cancún, Catania, Colombo, Fuerteventura, Heraklion [Irákleia], Ibiza, Milan [Milano] (MXP & BGY), Mombasa, Moscow [Moskva] (DME), Mykonos [Míkonos], Naples [Napoli], New York (JFK), Palermo, Punta Cana, Rome [Roma] (FCO), Rimini, Sharm-el-Sheikh, Trieste, Turin [Torino], Venice [Venezia]

Fleet

Type	Nº	Seats	Engines
Airbus A319-115LR	1	C48	CFM56-5B7/P
Airbus A320-214	8	Y180	CFM56-5B4/P/-2P
Airbus A330-223	3	C26Y256	PW4168A

On order

Airbus A350	3
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PHOTOS: MARCO FINELLI



The generous cheese platter and decadent dessert offered by MiMa Club service.

Pushback was at 1657, three minutes ahead of schedule, and we taxied at precisely 1700, the A319 heading toward the threshold of Runway 35L. While taxiing, the captain announced an 8hr 45min flying time to JFK.

After a relatively long takeoff roll (by A319 standards), we lifted off at 1710. The airplane climbed briskly and turned to the left, then followed a zigzag path in order to avoid the quickly developing late afternoon summer cumulonimbus clouds that were piling up across the Lake Maggiore area.

As soon as our initial cruise altitude was reached, cabin service resumed, with flight attendants offering blankets, pillows, amenity kits, and hi-fi-quality headphones. Menu cards were promptly distributed, along with the apéritif service, which consisted of an offering of two delicious salmon and scampi canapés, with a wide selection of drinks.

Dinner, catered by Servair, was served after we had crossed an overcast France. The meal was a veritable epicurean banquet, and a tribute to Italian cuisine, featuring an array of flavors. There was a choice of antipasti, from which I chose a superb assortment of Cinta Senese ham—from the eponymous prized and highly-reputed breed of pig from Tuscany [Toscana]—bacon, lard, and salami, served with pine nuts and grapes. This was followed by a choice of two hot pasta dishes, either Lasagne ‘alla Bolognese’ or Crespelle ‘Mare e monti’; the latter are crepes filled with Porcini mushrooms and shrimps, served with a green asparagus velouté.

The *pièce de resistance* was either a fish dish or veal escalopes in black truffle and Marsala sauce, served with grilled vegetables.

A large Italian cheese platter, accompanied by a choice of honey or pear mustard, was followed by fresh fruits and a selection of three decadent desserts, including a slice of Pastiera Napoletana—a traditional cake from Naples [Napoli]—Crema Catalana, or passionfruit mousse.

The accompanying wines—generously poured—were

also a tribute to Italy. They included a great Pàtrimo and a vintage Brunello di Montalcino, as well as two relaxing passito dessert wines. All the food had real flavors and was served on fine designer china. Not even a single piece of crockery was ‘pre-packaged’; instead, everything was hand-placed on each passenger’s properly set-up tray table. The whole dinner experience, which took almost an hour and a half to complete, was undeniably one of the highlights of the trip.

Meanwhile the flight had progressed westward after leaving the southernmost tip of Cornwall, beginning our oceanic crossing, to take us on a southerly track over a completely overcast North Atlantic. Replete and satiated, most passengers took a nap, and we finally crossed into North America over St John’s, Newfoundland, 6hr 20min after departure.

Over the coast of Massachusetts, a snack consisting of a prosciutto crudo-filled croissant and macaroon pastry was served, while the A319 encountered a patch of turbulence caused by headwinds of 125mph (200kph). This reduced our ground speed to a mere 430mph (695kph).

Descent began over New Bedford, and continued along Long Island. After MacArthur Islip Airport and Lake Ronkonkoma, we followed a course toward the sea, entering a pattern that led to touchdown on Runway 31R at 2006. We blocked on at Gate 20 of Terminal 4 (the main international terminal at JFK) exactly on time at 2020.

When we disembarked, there were long lines at immigration, leading me to fear a wait of at least an hour. But an efficient agent came to round up the Eurofly passengers and ushered us to a fast track for immediate passport control. Thus, I completed arrival formalities in less than 25 minutes, and having already collected my suitcase was out in the balmy New York evening, at the passenger pickup area, by 2145. ➔

(For a description of the return eastbound service, check out ‘Business Flyer’ at In Flight: www.airwaysmag.com.)