

To East Africa on Air Uganda's first MD-87

by Luigi Vallero



Air Uganda received its first McDonnell Douglas MD-87 on March 5.

The ex-Iberia twin-jet was delivered to the fledgling East African carrier by Meridiana under the auspices of AKFED (Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development—*News from the Airways*, January 2008). Already, the Italian carrier had supplied two other examples of the type to Air Burkina (*Airways*, December 2007) and CAM (Compagnie Aérienne du Mali) in keeping with its commitment to AKFED to provide technical and managerial support to the African network of Group Celestair.



Passengers were looked after by three Ugandan flight attendants—Liz Kanyunyuzi, Annette Kyomughisha, and Julyan Nankya—supervised by Antonello Deiola, the Meridiana purser responsible for Air Uganda's cabin services.

Air Uganda's MD-87 has 20 business (pictured) and 79 economy seats, all upholstered in dark-blue leather.



After lengthy preparations, the MD-87 was handed over to Air Uganda's CEO, Peter de Waal, on February 29. The following day at 0530, 35 passengers and crew, including Air Uganda and Meridiana employees, assembled at Olbia (IATA: OLB/ICAO: LIEO), on the island of Sardinia [Sardegna], Italy, for the delivery flight to Entebbe (EBB/HUEN). The MD-87's estimated takeoff weight was increased to 53,811kg (118,635lb) by a load of engineering equipment and spare parts, as well as catering items for use on Air Uganda's scheduled services. In deference to the airplane's range capabilities, an intermediate stop was to be made at Luxor, Egypt (LXR/HELX)—almost exactly half-way along the route.

At 0648, slightly behind schedule, the MD-87 left the parking stand and headed for Runway 24, the prevailing *mistral* dictating a westerly departure. Six minutes later the airplane lifted off and turned left to intercept Airway UM603 which would take it over the island of Ponza [Isola di Ponza] in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

We entered Egyptian airspace in the vicinity of El 'Alamein, whence we headed on a more southerly course, proceeding to Sidi Barrâni. Now, the River Nile became our constant reference point, its winding course and lush green banks on both sides providing a stark contrast to the dry open spaces of the Egyptian desert. Impressive desert canyons followed, then it was time to prepare for landing at Luxor, which appeared as an oasis amidst the sands.

A strong tailwind had reduced our flying time, and touchdown was at 1223lt, 3hr 29min after leaving OLB. The need to reach EBB no earlier than 1800lt meant an increase of ground time at LXR to one hour, thus allowing passengers and crew to disembark and stretch their legs.

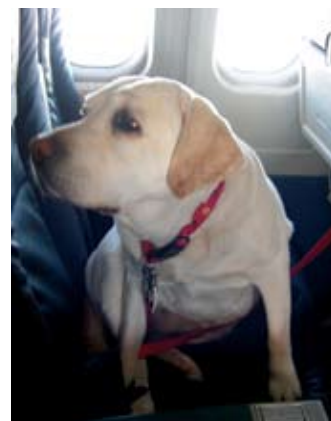
After a delay of 15 minutes, a bus arrived to convey us to the terminal. But we remained static in the uncomfortable heat and blazing sunshine while uncooperative and officious authorities insisted that all passengers had to be in possession of a visa to gain access to the airport's transit area. As such a demand was nonsensical, especially given the limited time available, it was decided that we would leave the bus and reboard the MD-87.

Then more potentially disruptive news was received. A Livingston Energy Flight Airbus A321, en route from Milan [Milano]-Malpensa and Verona to the Red Sea resort of Marsa 'Alam with more than 200 passengers, had just declared a complete hydraulic failure, and was expected to make an emergency landing at LXR within a few minutes. Apprehensive of what might happen to the stricken A321—while mindful of what a delay would do to our planned arrival time in Entebbe—we again left the cabin to watch the landing of the Airbus. Fortunately, the aircraft landed without incident with spoilers and thrust reversers deployed and was towed to a parking stand.

We took off from LXR at 1423, heading south over Aswan, Lake Nasser, and the temple of Abu Simbel



Four captains shared flightdeck duties: Air Uganda's Flight Operations Director Capt Ermanno Tamorri and Capt Steven Wegoye, and Meridiana's Flight Operations Director Capt Alessandro Sesta and Flight Training Director Capt Vincenzo Tremante.



Maya: A canine companion on the flight.

PHOTOS: LUIGI VALLERO

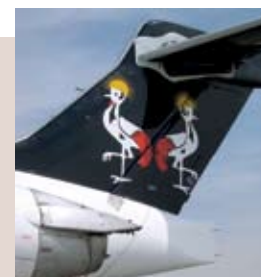
before entering the northern territories of Sudan. The black pyramids of Merowe were clearly visible, then the cities of Khartoum and Juba, before we entered Uganda, approximately following the path of the Victoria Nile (the river arising from Lake Victoria). The transition from desert to tropical environment began during the

Air Uganda

Entebbe-based Air Uganda began operations in November 2007 with two DC-9-30s leased on an ACMI (Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance, Insurance) basis from South African lessor Global Aviation.

The MD-87 (5X-UGA) is the first of the type to join the fledgling carrier. After several route proving flights on the airline's network, as well as to Zanzibar, it entered scheduled service on March 5 between Entebbe and Nairobi, Kenya, as Flight U7 204, replacing one of the DC-9s. A second MD-87 was scheduled for delivery in May to displace the remaining DC-9.

Air Uganda's network connects Entebbe Airport, which serves the country's capital city of Kampala, with Dar es Salaam and Kilimajaro (Tanzania), Juba (Sudan), and Nairobi; other destinations are expected to be added shortly.



Air Uganda's livery features a traditional 'crested cranes' symbol.



The travelling party assembles for a group photo during the LXR stopover (the author is third from the left, standing).

final part of this stage, the hilly and bushy landscape of northern Uganda proving remarkably similar to the wild landscapes of inner Sardinia, with only the red colour of the African earth and the occasional hut hinting at the disparate geographical difference.

Approaching Entebbe Airport from the northwest, the pilots chose to surprise the waiting crowd with low flypast, overflying the runway at exactly 1800, the planned arrival time, then heading over the vast water expanses of Lake Victoria before making a tight right-hand turn over the lesser islands dotting the lake around the peninsular.

But there was more. A second low pass was executed, this time with landing gear extended, and a wave to the crowd with waggled wings. Finally, after a smooth landing we taxied past Entebbe's main terminal building, with national flags waving from the cockpit windows, before stopping in front of the waiting crowd at 1816lt.

At the formal acceptance ceremony, VIPs, members of the local media, and airline and airport employees welcomed the new airplane to Air Uganda's modest fleet, thus concluding an enjoyable and memorable experience for all participants. ➔

(Airways thanks Peter de Waal, CEO of Air Uganda; Juan Wolmarans, flight dispatching manager; and all Air Uganda and Meridiana personnel who assisted in the preparation of this article.)



PHOTOS: LUIGI VALLERO

Entebbe International Airport and the approach over Lake Victoria.

DEP	ARR	DIST NM	WIND CO KTS	FLT TIME	FL	BLOCK FUEL (Kg)	TRIP (Kg)	PLD Kg	EZFW (Kg)	ETOW (Kg)
OLB	LXR	1588	50 HEAD	4:17	340/ROXAN360/PNZ370	13271	10060	4000	40840	53811
LXR	EBB	1586	4 HEAD	3:48		370	12491	9128	4000	40840
ROUTING										
OLB	LXR	SUKU5D SUKUN UM603 PNZ UM729 CDC UM620 MASOT UM728 SALUN A145 BRN 1451 LXR								
LXR	EBB	LXR W605 SML A727 NUBAR UA727 KTM UB527D JUB ATUGA UG656D TORNO TORN1A								

ENTRY PNT's	1st LEG	EGYPT/SALUN-AWYA145 2h:23' after Take Off
		SUDAN/NUBAR-AWYUA727 - 00h:42' after Take Off
	2nd LEG	UGANDA/ATUGA-AWY UG656D 03h:09' after Take Off

The routing entailed a first 1,588nm (2,940km) sector from OLB to LXR, along SUKU5D SUKUN UM603 PNZ UM729 CDC UM620 MASOT UM728 SALUN A145 BRN 1451 LXR, estimated at 4hr 17m, followed by the final 1,586nm (2,937km) leg into the heart of Africa, from LXR to EBB via W605 SML A727 NUBAR UA727 KTM UB527D JUB ATUGA UG656D TORNO TORN1A, planned at 3hr 48m.