

ATN at a Glance

Pilots joined ALPA: 2009

Pilots: 1,000+

Pilot domiciles: Atlanta, Ga., and Orlando, Fla.

Headquarters: Dallas, Tex.

Operations/services: AirTran Airways, a wholly owned subsidiary of Southwest Airlines Co., offers coast-to-coast and near-international service with around 340 flights a day to 35+ domestic and 7 near-international destinations.

Fleet: 72 B-717s and 33 B-737s

AirTran

Pilots Navigate a Turbulent Transition

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During 2013, the pilots of AirTran Airways became immersed in the transition to Southwest Airlines. More than 500 pilots completed training to become Southwest line pilots. As 2014 begins, more than 1,000 pilots remain at AirTran.

Last year was full of multiple challenges relating to the Southwest acquisition. The company's decision to sublease AirTran's B-717 fleet to Delta left the pilot group disenchanted and angered. An arbitration process dealing with the sublease and its effect on the ratified integration agreement began in September 2012 and came to a close in November 2013. At stake were captain positions, compensation, and base preference.

In May, an arbitrator determined that the complaint was within the jurisdiction of the dispute resolution process. The second arbitration brought a disappointing conclusion to the process when the

arbitrator rejected AirTran pilot claims and declined to remedy the problems produced by the B-717 sublease.

Throughout both the arbitrations and the waiting period in between, the AirTran pilot group maintained consummate professionalism and unity. Led by

the AirTran Master Executive Council (MEC), the pilots have overcome numerous ordeals that can accompany an acquisition of this magnitude.

The Milwaukee (MKE) B-737 domicile was closed in March, and those MKE-based pilots were sent to their awarded positions, some becoming Southwest first officers and some remaining at AirTran to then fly the B-717. The Orlando (MCO) base for AirTran B-737s was closed by September, and those pilots were sent across the partition to Southwest first officer positions despite several senior pilots holding B-717 captain awards. These and other unexpected changes from the ratified agreement have caused disruption and financial harm to AirTran pilots.

As the transition continues and the number of pilots working under the AirTran collective bargaining agreement declines, the MEC continues the business of representing its pilots. Many officers, committee chairmen, and volunteers have transitioned to Southwest, and other AirTran pilots have stepped in to do the work. With more than 600 pilots expected to remain at AirTran throughout the summer, the MEC's efforts to represent their interests will continue.

AirTran pilots saw the Southwest Atlanta pilot domicile open on Aug. 1, 2013. This bittersweet event brought back several former AirTran pilots who had already transitioned to Southwest and demonstrated a more tangible blending of the operations. AirTran routes will continue to transfer to

Southwest operations during 2014 with the final AirTran flying being completed around year's end.

"This coming year will bring the integration of the majority of the premerger AirTran pilot group," says Capt. Mark Hatten, the pilots' MEC chairman. "Throughout the entire process, the constant has been the professionalism of the AirTran pilots. With all that this pilot group has weathered, it continues to rally and support each other in every situation, making the needs of fellow pilots the overall priority."

The MEC's primary focus this year will be the single representation of both the AirTran and Southwest pilot groups as operations will be combined by the end of the year. And while ALPA's leaders and staff remain committed to making available all union resources to the AirTran pilots, preparations for change in union representation must move forward. The MEC leaders recognize the value in a single, unified pilot group at Southwest and plan to continue working with the Southwest Airlines Pilots' Association (SWAPA) to blueprint the process and establish a suitable time line.

In 2014, the remaining AirTran pilots will take part in the final integration of the two airlines and the eventual single-carrier status. This group of pilots will conclude a proud chapter of airline history and begin the next chapter as Southwest Airlines pilots. The final and lasting legacy of AirTran pilots will be one of excellence, dignity, and regard for their fellow pilots. 



AirTran Local Executive Council 71 chairman Capt. Jim Gallagher and (former) AirTran F/O Christi Taylor in the cockpit of their B-717. Taylor transitioned to Southwest Airlines in February 2013.