

Malaysia Airlines has one of Asia's best safety records
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A MAS flight is ready for takeoff at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang today. None of the MAS flights today are grounded.

Malaysia Airlines, operator of Flight MH370 that went missing en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing today, has established a record as one of the Asia-Pacific's best full-service carriers in terms of safety and service despite some recent financial problems.

The Kuala Lumpur-based carrier competes with AirAsia domestically, and with the likes of AirAsia X, Emirates, Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways and Cathay Pacific on international routes.

The airline, part of the Oneworld alliance that includes British Airways and Qantas, has 88 aircraft in its fleet, including Airbus A330s and A380s, and Boeing 777-200s and 737s, according to its website.

They include 15 777-200ERs, one of which was involved in today's disappearance. These aircraft are deployed on its long-range services within the Asia-Pacific and to Europe.

Its fleet of 777-200ERs has an average age of 14.2 years, according to airfleets.com, an authoritative website that tracks airline fleets, making it one of the oldest such fleets of 777-200s in the world.

It was unclear if the age of the plane had any bearing on its disappearance, given authorities were still trying to determine the flight's presumed crash site in the South China Sea today.

The airline was set to order Airbus A330 or A350 aircraft to start replacing some of its older 777s from 2016, with the management having identified fleet replacement as a key plank of its plan to turn around the loss-making airline.

In February, the airline reported a net loss of RM343.4 million for the three months ended December 2013, its fourth consecutive quarterly loss.

Its full-year loss of RM1.17 billion was nearly three times higher than in 2012.

The last fatal incident involving a Malaysia Airlines aircraft took place on September 15, 1995, when 34 people died after a Fokker 50 crashed on approach to Tawau, a town in the Eastern Malaysian state of Sabah.

Before that, in 1977, a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 737-200 crashed in Tanjung Kupang, in Johor state, killing all 100 people on board. That was the deadliest crash to-date involving a Malaysian aircraft.

The Boeing 777 is the US plane maker's most popular wide-body aircraft. The first models to be produced were the 777-200 in 1995 and the 777-200ER two years later, followed by the 777-300 in 1998.

Boeing then produced the longer-range 777-300ER and 777-200LR variants in 2004 and 2006 respectively.

The Boeing 777-200ER has a range of 14,305 kilometres and a cruising speed of Mach 0.84, according to Boeing.

The Boeing 777 has one of the best safety records of any commercial aircraft in service.

The first serious incident took place in January 2008, when a British Airways 777-200ER crash-landed just short of London's Heathrow airport, injuring 45 people.

In July 2011, an Egypt Air 777-200ER had a fire in the cockpit while parked at a gate in Cairo and was evacuated without injuries.

Both aircraft were written off.

The only fatal crash so far came on July 6 last year when Asiana Airlines flight 214 struck a seawall on landing in San Francisco. Of 307 people aboard, three died and more than 180 were injured.

The crash investigation, while still ongoing, has so far indicated no mechanical failure and focused on the pilots' failure to recognise that the plane was flying too low and too slowly as it approached the runway. – Reuters, March 8, 2014.

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