



LOCKHEED MARTIN

The first PSA TriStar lifts off from Palmdale on a pre-delivery flight. A fairing underneath the forward fuselage was added for protection of lower-deck lounge occupants in the event of a belly landing.

PSA's TriStars

by Jon Proctor

As part of what many thought to be a novel plan, California intrastate carrier Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA) jolted the industry in 1970 by ordering Lockheed L-1011 TriStar wide-body transports, for use mainly on the heavily travelled but short (340mi/550km) route between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The airline began in 1949 in modest fashion with service between San Diego and Oakland via Burbank, using a lone DC-3 that was augmented with a second example later that year. PSA quickly grew, adding more DC-3s, 70-passenger DC-4s, and, in 1959, brand-new Lockheed 188 Electra turboprops. The latter were introduced over a network that still included only four destinations: San Diego, Burbank, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. They were a perfect fit for the airline, all but duplicating the performance of pure-jet aircraft on these relatively short segments.

As an intrastate airline, PSA came under the jurisdiction of the California Public Utilities Commission, which allowed it to undercut trunk line fares and keep its operation simple. Tickets were nothing more than cash register receipts, with names recorded on small cards that were bundled up and kept for a few months, then disposed of. The streamlined operation persisted as PSA continued to expand. Coffee, tea, punch, and soft drinks were the extent of in-flight service, along with cocktails for purchase.

Boeing 727s and 737s were acquired in the mid-Sixties for the added capacity required to keep up with increased traffic, and the addition of more California cities such as San Jose and Sacramento. A pair of McDonnell Douglas DC-9 Series 30s joined the fleet in anticipation of service to smaller communities.

By 1970, PSA had an unbroken, 21-year record of passenger growth, and its managers projected a 15% increase for the following year. It was already operating flights within a few minutes of each other during morning and evening peak commuter periods. Gate space at Los Angeles and San Francisco was at a premium and traffic congestion at the airports hurt the airline's on-time record and aircraft utilization.



LOCKHEED

Lockheed's formal TriStar proposal to PSA included this artist's rendering in the company's earlier colors.



Lounge areas throughout the main deck provided a total of 44 seats.



A portion of the lower-deck lounge area looking aft. The staircase led to the main deck. Passengers were able to board through the lower deck integral staircase, drop off luggage, and proceed upstairs. One downside of the lounge area (below) was the lack of windows.



Looking forward, the carry-on luggage room is seen with the integral stairs retracted. The two doors at the front led to the lounge area.



The lower-deck carry-on luggage area and lounge with an integral staircase located on the left-hand side of the aircraft.

Meanwhile, Lockheed, which had not sold one of its L-1011 TriStars in more than a year, approached PSA with a tailor-made and financially attractive proposal. After considering a similar offer from McDonnell Douglas for DC-10s, PSA President J Floyd Andrews signed a letter of intent for the purchase of two L-1011s for 1972 delivery, plus firm delivery positions for three more airplanes to be acquired at a rate of one a year between 1973 and 1975; the contract was formalized on Christmas Eve.

Lockheed's decision to make Rolls-Royce's RB211 the sole powerplant option for the L-1011 resulted in major delays when the British engine manufacturer went into receivership. As a result, PSA nearly canceled its order but reaffirmed the deal in December 1973, scheduling delivery of the first TriStar for the second quarter of 1974. Arrangements were later made to lease the first two aircraft from Lockheed (through 1989); the last three would be bought and received in the second half of 1975.

The first L-1011 (Fleet N° 501, registered N10112), immediately nicknamed 'Mother Grinning Bird' by PSA's employees, entered service on August 1, 1974. Replacing a single Boeing 727-200, the tri-jet was scheduled to operate three Los Angeles-San Francisco roundtrips, beginning and ending each day at San Diego, home of the airline's maintenance base. Load factors averaged around 50% and the aircraft achieved a dispatch record of better than 98%.

PSA opted for an attractive 281-seat (eight- and nine-abreast) layout on the main deck, broken up by nine 'lounge areas', where seats faced each other. Unique to its TriStars was a lower-deck 16-seat lounge in place of the forward cargo compartment. A carry-on luggage area replaced the lower-deck galley. Both sections were accessible by a staircase from the main cabin as well as integral boarding stairs from ground level.

The second PSA TriStar (N° 502/N10114), leased from Lockheed, left the Palmdale factory on August 30 for a 46,000mi (74,000km) around-the-world sales trip that included a stop at Britain's Farnborough Air Show.

Twenty-one PSA employees accompanied Lockheed sales executives, including 12 stewardesses, two mechanics, six pilots, and a public relations director. The airplane returned to San Diego on October 4 and began flying with PSA 14 days later.

With two TriStars in the fleet, the schedule was changed to allow simultaneous 0800 departures from both Los Angeles and San Francisco and a total of ten daily roundtrips between the two cities. Turnaround times were increased from 35 minutes to one hour.

The logic used to justify adding TriStars to PSA's fleet evaporated in somewhat of a storm, when the Arab oil crisis dramatically boosted fuel prices, resulting in a 10% drop in California air travel. While the wide-bodies could still fill up during rush hour periods, they could not produce enough overall revenue to justify the cost of operation. By fall, adjusted schedules called for more downtime between morning and evening rush hours, and on Saturdays.

PSA's two L-1011s were removed from service on March 31, 1975, with the hope of their return to service on June 15. But traffic continued to lag and the pair was ferried to the Arizona desert for storage. Without a cancellation clause in the agreement, the airline was unable to return the aircraft and could not find anyone interested in sub-leasing these uniquely configured airplanes. For the year, PSA took a \$14.8 million write-down (equivalent to some \$55 million today) in connection with the TriStar program; leasing costs on the two parked aircraft were \$10,000 (\$37,000) per day. Andrews resigned a year later, reportedly forced to do so by the board of directors in part because of his decision to purchase L-1011s. Many in the company thought this to be unfair and more the result of oil prices and a recession.

A protracted lawsuit began when PSA refused to take delivery of the last three TriStars. Lockheed wanted to keep the nearly \$18 million (\$67 million) deposit paid by PSA, while the airline wanted relief from its purchase



LOCKHEED

The dozen PSA hostesses who accompanied the TriStar on its sales trip lined up for a photo call at Hong Kong, where the airplane was shown off to customer Cathay Pacific Airways.



HARRY SIEVERS

The second TriStar (N10114) at San Diego, PSA's base. Burbank and Sacramento were planned TriStar destinations that did not come to fruition.



JON PROCTOR COLLECTION

The two TriStars that actually flew for PSA languish at Marana, Arizona, awaiting disposition.



NICKY SCHERRER

Wearing the logos of TriStar customers, N10114 was displayed at Farnborough in September 1974.



Wearing MSN 1114 just behind the cockpit windows, N10115 is seen stored at Palmdale in February 1976, along with N10116 (below). All five of PSA's aircraft were painted in full company colors.



Registered C-GIFE, the former N10114 was photographed at Toronto in March 1986, still equipped with the underside fairing.



PHOTOS: HARRY SIEVERS



PHOTOS: JON PROCTOR COLLECTION

LTU initially operated the three undelivered PSA TriStars using the lower-deck lounge. D-AERI (ex-N10115) was destroyed by fire on the ground during maintenance at Düsseldorf in 1991.



JEFF BURKH

Lockheed converted the two original PSA TriStar 1s to TriStar 100s (with higher operating weights) at Ontario, California. Seen shortly after delivery to AeroPerú, N10112 displays the integral staircase leading to the carry-on luggage area and lower-deck lounge.



BOB SHANE

In 1996, the first PSA TriStar was converted to a flying hospital for Operation Blessing International Relief and Development Corporation, founded by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson (Airways, Jul/Aug 1996). Later re-registered in Aruba as P4-MED, the TriStar has been inactive for more than a year, stored at Tucson, Arizona. This is the sole survivor of the five: the second, fourth, and fifth airframes have been scrapped, and the third was destroyed in a ground fire.

PSA TRISTARS

Fleet N°	Regn	MSN	Remarks
501	N10112	1064	to Worldways Canada (C-GIES)
502	N10114	1079	to Worldways Canada (C-GIFE)
503	N10115	1114	not operated; to LTU (D-AERI)
504	N10116	1120	not operated; to LTU (D-AERE)
505	N10117	1125	not operated; to LTU (D-AERU)

obligation. The situation was made more difficult by the non-standard PSA aircraft interiors, which made them difficult to place with other airlines. Nevertheless, Lockheed cooperated with PSA by marketing the three undelivered TriStars. A full-color brochure, dated June 1975, promoted the special lounge and carry-on features, supposedly making the aircraft attractive for short-haul commuter operations, or even charters. Included were provisions for installation of conventional galley areas on the main deck, but no offers were made to remove PSA's lower-deck configurations.

An internal proposal at Trans World Airlines called for utilization of the two stored TriStars on the highly competitive route between Chicago-O'Hare and New York-LaGuardia during the week and as charter aircraft on weekends, but ultimately it was decided that scheduling issues would not produce the desired results, and the plan died in its infancy.

Following US deregulation in 1978, it was said that PSA marketing people were thinking about flying the two grounded TriStars between California and Hawai'i. Perhaps more a fantasy than legitimate claim, the rumor was quickly denied by management.

The counter lawsuits were settled in 1980, two years after Lockheed had sold the three undelivered L-1011s to German charter airline LTU International Airways (*Airways*, March & August 2007). With Lockheed's help, the original two aircraft had been sub-leased to South American carrier AeroPerú for two years, but they returned to the desert that year and never re-entered service with PSA.

In 1985, PSA arranged for Toronto-based charter operator Worldways Canada to buy the two TriStars from then-owner Bank of America National Trust and Savings Association, finally relieving the airline of any responsibility for aircraft it had ceased operating a decade earlier. Three years later, PSA was acquired by USAir and its smile disappeared from the skies. ➔