

Q. Staying with the baggage subject, I've heard some tales of baggage taking a long time to get to the hall. Is there anything bmi can do to speed up getting the baggage into the hall?

We have been working extremely hard to speed up our baggage delivery process at Heathrow, with satisfying results. We measure (in fact, it is an official BAA measurement to ensure accuracy) the time taken for the 1st and the last bag to arrive at the carousel and our goal is for the first bag to arrive within 17 minutes and the last bag to arrive within 27 minutes (timed from the aircraft arriving on its stand). Because of the challenging geography of Heathrow airport, this is a very tough standard to reach but it also means that because customers have to walk to the arrivals hall and clear immigration, as long as the last bag arrives within 35 minutes, there should be very little waiting time for our customers. *(Subsequent to the interview, Dominic Paul, Director airport services, ground operations and cargo has written to say "In January for all flights arriving from Saudi Arabia, the average time taken for the 1st bag to arrive was 14 minutes and the average time for the last bag was 31 minutes, this increased slightly in February to 18 minutes for the first bag and 32 minutes for the last bag. In March, so far, we have an average of 10 minutes for the first bag and 22 minutes for the last bag. We have experienced improvements in these figures by focussing heavily on baggage arrival performance and by increasing the level of manpower meeting and unloading our aircraft - hence the significant improvement in March.")*

Q. Many airlines operate Reward Schemes, are the bmi Diamond Club membership benefits different from other schemes?

Earning airmiles both with bmi and our Star Alliance partners and being able to use them on a range of flights, hotel accommodation, car hire etc. applies to all classes of membership. Passengers qualifying for Silver & Gold status also get an additional 20kg allowance on hold baggage, which might be quite useful for passengers on our Saudi routes. Unlike some of our competitors, bmi offers tier points on every class of flight so that frequent flyers, even those who always fly economy, can earn silver or gold membership with enough points. I believe that you can earn more miles, no matter what class of ticket you buy, with bmi than with any other frequent flyer programme. All of the details can be found on our website. (www.flybmi.com)

bmi's new business seats were featured on the inside front cover of our last edition.



Q. As a frequent flyer, I do prefer the bmi check-in facilities at Heathrow and find the cabin crew generally much more friendly than when I fly other airlines. Why is that?

I'm pleased to hear that, perhaps it's because we have a smaller team of people, which means that they do the same job more often. That probably means they gain experience more quickly and learn how to deal with passenger enquiries more efficiently. The dedicated check-in area at Heathrow works well for us allowing passengers into the airport facilities more quickly and certainly the quality of our staff is one of our prime assets.

Q. I'm glad to see the Airbus back on the Saudi route and understand you've made some changes at the front. What are they?

For some months now we've been flying a new cabin configuration. The major difference is that we introduced the lie-flat seats to the business cabin in September last year. These seats have a generous 26 inch width and 78-80 inch length. They are also fitted with 15 inch individual tv screens.

Q. I believe that you have increased the number of business seats to 42; surely this means that it will take business passengers longer to get served their meals?

I'd disagree with you there. On the Riyadh & Jeddah services we now have two chefs on board so passengers should not experience any delay with the in-flight service. In addition of course we do offer an express meal option for passengers who may want to get their heads down quite soon after take off.

Q. With the recent BMED acquisition bmi is now serving a lot of destinations in the Middle East. Are you talking to any of the new low-cost operators in the region about providing a joined up service between those points so that passengers flying out of the UK might be more able to take more 'round-trip' type flights.

Not at present, but bmi is constantly looking for ways to improve its service so I'd rule nothing out.

Editors Note:

Since meeting Nigel in January the Star Alliance partnership, which bmi is part of, has received the Market Leadership Award from specialist publication Air Transport World. This is the first time that the leading monthly magazine covering the airline industry has selected a global airline alliance for an award.

"In choosing Star Alliance, the editors are recognising its leadership position in constructing a seamless travel product for the traveller. This is demonstrated by the introduction of collocated and joint check-in facilities

at multiple airports, shared lounges, Star Connection Centres and the compatibility of loyalty programmes," said Perry Flint, editorial director and associate publisher of Air Transport World. "Furthermore, the development of StarNet and the selection of a common IT platform have set standards on how to establish an IT infrastructure for 19 member carriers and three regional member carriers. Star Alliance's combined efforts are symbolised through the common-branding of representative aircraft from each alliance member," he added.