QANTAS PILOTS GET NEW LOOK

News / Airlines



Captain Debbie Slade has been a Qantas pilot for 27 years and counting.

During that time, she has gone to work in a uniform that, while functional and practical, was never really designed for women pilots.

All that will change from October, when Slade will head into the flightdeck of the Airbus A330s she currently flies for Qantas in a new uniform from Australian designer Martin Grant that specifically caters for the airline's female pilots.

Slade, who modelled the new uniform at a runway fashion show held at Sydney's Carriageworks on Friday, is thrilled with the new design.

"We have had a female uniform but it hasn't been very feminine, it's still been pretty boxy and a lot of the girls haven't felt brilliant in it," Slade told *Australian Aviation* after her stint as a runway model.

"This is the first time it has actually got a little bit of shape and design for the feminine figure rather than for a girl in a boys' job."

"It's beautiful."

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Qantas announced in April 2015 Grant, the man responsible for the airline's new cabin crew uniforms, had been commissioned to update its pilot uniforms. The result is the first new pilot uniform in 13 years.

Since then, the France-based designer has held focus groups, conducted online surveys and trialled fabrics and designs in flight simulators in an effort to come up with something that satisfied regulatory requirements and that Qantas pilots would enjoy wearing.

"They did trials in the simulator so that they could work out reaching and how much you've got to move and when you are sitting down in the trousers for 15 hours how they are going to feel and are they comfortable," Slade explained.

"He really looked at how you are wearing it. It was fantastic consultation."

Grant said the "traditional yet modern" design reflected the glamour of flying and suited pilots' unique workplace environment.

One of the most significant challenges was coming up with a fabric that would pass tests for flammability and static, was washable and non-crushable.

"That was probably the longest development time actually, getting that right because it has to pass so many tests," Grant explained to *Australian Aviation*.

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Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce and designer Martin Grant launch the new pilot uniforms. (Jordan Chong)

Grant described the task of incorporating the pilot ranks on the uniform as “fascinating”.

“For me it was more the original challenge was actually the codes involved in the uniform, so all of the insignia, all of the ranking, a lot of that which is aviation norm, they have to be identifiable,” Grant said.

“To have to work with those things and then tweak them slightly, so we ended up talking about millimetres of change and that for me as a designer is actually quite interesting.

“For me it was important to keep the overtones of the military heritage, because that is where the uniform comes from and I think they are very proud of that.”

“That came through in speaking to the pilots and it is how I felt as well.”

“They automatically command respect and it is one of the top five most respected professions in the workforce and so that was very important.”

Features of the new designs include a new waterproof white top hat with a gold embroidered badge using the Qantas kangaroo logo, golden wattle embroidery on captains’ hats, a new wing badge, and finer gold rank stripes. The suits feature a lighter fabric colour and are single-breasted with a “streamlined” cut with red vents at the back, while the shirts are more fitted and women pilots will wear a specific female tie. There is also a trench coat from lightweight wool.

Suits are made from pure Australian merino wool with Australian cotton used for the shirts.

Qantas said new uniform fittings would begin in July, with all 3,000 domestic, international and regional pilots to be sporting the new look by the end of 2016.

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Martin Grant (centre) with pilots in the new Qantas uniform. (Duncan Killick via Qantas)

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