

AirSpace Bonus! The Air Up There: Airplane Facts with Max Transcript

Emily: Hi AirSpacers, we're busy getting season 10 ready for you, in the meantime we're bringing you a great episode from our friends at the Federal Aviation Administration's podcast *The Air Up There*. Here's their episode from 2023 with Airplane Facts with Max, an airplane mechanic who shares his job and Lord of the Rings facts on social media. Enjoy!

00:00

Max: I'm a pretty simple guy, really. I love skiing. I grew up in Colorado. I like to travel sometimes, but I'm kind of a homebody. I fix airplanes and I like to play music. That's really all I got, you know, and that's enough for me, for the most part.

00:15

Lucy Jabbour: For those of you who love watching social media videos about aviation...

00:18

Steve Custer: ...or Lord of the Rings.

00:20

Lucy Jabbour: Fair point. Well, you may recognize that voice.

00:24

Steve Custer: Talk about a guy that might not need an introduction, but just in case – that's Max – aka Airplane Facts with Max and he's our guest!

00:31

Lucy Jabbour: We're your hosts. I'm Lucy Jabbour.

00:33

Steve Custer: And I'm Steve-o Baggins. Also known as Steve Custer and this is – The Air Up There!

00:38

Various People: This is your captain speaking. The feeling I get when I'm flying is just; you get an adrenaline rush. Seeing something fly is awesome. It's incredible to be able to fly. Flying airplanes is all I've ever wanted to do. I get so excited about aviation,

aeronautics, space, engineering, and tech. Like star gazing and just wondering what it would be like to be up there. I just fell in love with it. Stick with your passion and pursue it. Just know you can do it. There is not a room, there is not a cockpit, there is not a place that you don't belong. There's certainly a place for everybody in aerospace.

01:10

Steve Custer: If you're looking for a well-paying career with lots of opportunities, please check out the FAA-certificated Aviation Maintenance Technician route.

01:18

Lucy Jabbour: It's hands on work and an invaluable role that helps ensure aircraft are operating safely.

01:23

Steve Custer: It's also a highly-transferrable and in-demand skill that would open the door for you to work in a broad-range of industries. Just like today's guest!

01:32

Steve Custer: I was gracious to have a friend a couple of months ago, pass along your Instagram to me. When did you kind of come up with the idea to start doing that?

01:42

Max: Yeah, it's not a very happy story, but I started making the videos just on my personal Instagram Stories, basically. It was a couple months after my wife had passed away and I was just needed to kind of distract myself and so, I was, I was out on the ramp waiting for the rest of my crew to show up and I just made a video where I was like, this is a brake, and it helps the airplane go a little bit slower. It makes it stop. And people were like, this is really funny. You're like the clear eyes guy. And then I made another story that was about the tire, which was the first one I ever posted on tick tock, where I said, it's different than a tire on your car just because it's on an airplane. And that one kind of popped off and so I started making the videos. And then, two or three months after I started making the videos, I was reading Lord of the Rings again, I was rereading it. I was like, wonder if I could make an airplane fact about Lord of the Rings? I was like, how would I do that though? Airplanes and Lord of the Rings don't have anything in common, but they do have a lot of differences. And then I thought about the fan blades and Aragorn's sword.

02:44

Steve Custer: That one that was the first video I saw was the fan blades.

02:46

Max: And that was my first Lord of the Rings video. And then I was like, oh, this is fun. I look at an airplane and I'm like, what's Lord of the Rings on here? Because there's not much.

02:58

Steve Custer: I love that I love that lens at which you could look at an airplane and think what's the Lord of the Rings about this?

03:02

Max: Yeah. You know, it was even more surprising because I was like, why is lord of the rings and airplanes, like the key to social media success, apparently? The trifecta, you know. It's Lord of the Rings, airplanes, and metal t-shirts that... I never would have thought.

03:17

Steve Custer: But now we know the formula. Thank you, Max.

03:19

Max: But now we know, yeah, you can take it and try it yourself.

03:24

Steve Custer: Thanks for sharing that. And I know that that was a bit personal to share too. So, thank you.

03:28

Max: Yeah, it is, but that's how it started, though, you know. And so, it's been it's been a very unexpected, an unexpected journey.

03:36

Lucy Jabbour: So, do you have like an airplane fact that kind of stands out as like one of your favorite ones that you've put up?

03:42

Max: Yeah, I think my favorite one... it might be the fan blade one. I think that one was fun to do because it was the first one. But my most popular one I thought was, when I filmed that was like this one's not, nobody's gonna watch this one and then that one took off. It's the one about the 787-window fading. You know, because they darken electronically, and I talk about how it's different than when Frodo after Frodo got stabbed on Weathertop and that one just took off. And I was like, it's stupid. Nobody's gonna like that one, but I'll post it anyways.

04:11

Steve Custer: Well, hey, I know we're talking about, you know, you and starting Airplane Facts With Max, but you know, for you out there listening. Can I ask you, Max? What do you do for a living?

04:22

Max: So, I'm a, I'm an aircraft mechanic. I have my airframe and powerplant certificate, and I just fix airplanes.

04:29

Steve Custer: How did you get into that line of work? Was that something you always wanted to do? Or was this something that, you know, fell into your lap one day like The One Ring and you decided to save us all?

04:40

Max: My uncle didn't gift me anything to make this happen like Frodo, but I was actually working as a bartender at the time in my early 20s and my first my first child was born and I thought, man I need, I need to do something different. And I had some friends that had gone to tech school for to get their ANPs. And one of them was going and he's like, you should come be an aircraft mechanic and I was like, that sounds cool. That sounds really cool, actually, because I could do that. I like more hands-on stuff. I've always liked fixing stuff and working with my dad on stuff and I thought fixing airplanes sounded cool and it is. It's fun.

05:17

Steve Custer: Can confirm and you make it cool, especially.

05:21

Lucy Jabbour: What do you like about your line of work? I mean, is it the hands-on thing? You kind of said that, but was there anything else that kind of stood out to you about it?

05:28

Max: Well, airplanes are cool. I've always like airplanes. Seeing something fly is awesome. Getting to work on something that flies is awesome. I like that every day can be pretty different. You don't necessarily know what your job is going to be for that day or that week or that airplane. To me, it's really rewarding when you're done and you get to see your airplane fly away.

05:49

Steve Custer: Oh, man, that's cool.

05:51

Lucy Jabbour: That is.

05:51

Max: Yeah.

05:52

Steve Custer: That was actually going to dovetail into part of some of my next questions, which were like, do you work on specific parts of a plane? Or generally all of it? You know, as I watch your videos, Max, I already believe like, this man is a shipwright. He can build everything on this ship.

06:09

Max: I wouldn't go that far, but I'm a general mechanic. So, most A&Ps. They do everything, you know. You're licensed to work on the whole plane. You know, some people specialize in some things. There's things that I like doing more than others. I've done several landing gear changes this year and I actually really enjoy that. Some people don't. It can be a little greasy. Get a little dirty, but I do like that. It's a lot of fun. It's interesting.

06:34

Steve Custer: Well, like a Dúnedain Ranger. You are not afraid to get your hands dirty.

06:37

Max: No. Yeah.

06:39

Steve Custer: With landing gear. Sounds like maybe this year has had a penchant for doing that, but is that a favorite thing for you to work on on an airplane? Or do you have a very specific part that, you know, I guess if you hear that repair is coming, do you say, I want to do that?

06:52

Max: Yeah, when I know that we have a plane coming in that's slated for a landing gear change. I'm happy to be on the crew. I'm like, let me at it. Put me in coach.

07:02

Steve Custer: Awesome.

07:03

Max: It's kind of weird. When you, the first time you see an airplane without any landing gear you're like, Huh. You know, it's just up on jacks. And you're like, that's crazy.

07:12

Lucy Jabbour: Do you have like a favorite aircraft that you, to work on? Kind of similar to the what we just talked about? But...

07:19

Max: Oh, yeah. People think I'm crazy when I say this. They think I'm joking, but I'm not. It's the Q-400. I love that airplane.

07:25

Lucy Jabbour: Can you explain to people who aren't familiar with what Q-400 means? Basically, like, what makes that aircraft special to you? Or what, can you describe it?

07:33

Max: Well, it's the first airplane I ever worked on at my first job and I love turboprops. You know, big propellers and we'd be changing the blades and they can be kind of they can be kind of hard to work on. A lot of people didn't like them, but it was just such a

great airplane to learn on. It had these big Pratt and Whitney 150 engines and big propellers and it just, it could take off like crazy. It was awesome.

07:57

Lucy Jabbour: So, you come off as a really good teacher in your videos. I mean, do you as part of your role instruct, or train like other people on the job? Is that kind of built into what you do?

08:09

Max: It's definitely not a job title that I have, but sometimes, you know, you'll have done a job several times, and you understand that system. And you'll get paired with somebody that is maybe newer to the floor and you kind of can teach them things as you're working through the job. So, it's kind of natural, you know. You're always learning in this career, which is another thing I love about aviation maintenance is you're always learning new things. You're always learning new systems. I do, like, enjoy helping other people.

08:37

Steve Custer: You're speaking music to my ears hearing that, you know, not every day is routine either. So, it does sound like that's an exciting job all the way around the board. And you know, maybe I'm trying to figure out the angle here on how we can light the beacons to get more aircraft mechanics. Giving aid to Max. What kind of advice would you give to those that are looking to become an aircraft mechanic?

09:00

Max: I think there's, you know, Part 147 schools most places around the country and it's not a too long of a program. For me, it was just going to school for, you know, 18 months, roughly and there's a high demand for aircraft mechanics, you know. A lot of places need them. A lot of the people that I work with are getting kind of closer towards retirement too, and so, it's actually a pretty good time, I think to be getting into the field, because there's going to be a lot more opportunity in the next couple of years.

09:27

Steve Custer: That's great to hear and to our listener out there, you know, if that's an appetizing opportunity. Then it sounds like a great school to go to and a cool job to come out the other side with.

09:36

Max: Yeah, I think a lot of people don't think about the trades. When, you know, when you go to school, you don't hear about the trades. There's been people that I've told I'm an aircraft mechanic, and they're like, I didn't even realize that that was a job. And you're like, it is. You got to fix them. And they're like, I didn't think airplanes could break. And you're like, oh, they do, yeah, you know. But I think there's a lot of kids out there that probably don't recognize that it is a job that they could even go into.

10:04

Lucy Jabbour: Yeah.

10:05

One thing I did notice with my page is that there's a lot, I get a lot of people asking me, how can I do this? This is cool. And I've told some people. Given some people some advice, and I've had them message me back a couple months later, where they're like, hey, man, I'm starting. I'm starting at this school next month. I'm real excited. Or I get a lot of people that are in school and they asked me advice about what they should do after school. When they get out where they should get work and, you know, it's such a big industry. There's so many niches out there.

10:34

Lucy Jabbour: That's awesome that you've kind of become sort of an accidental recruiter, right, for the industry. We need people like you, Max, obviously. I mean, we are kind of in this area where there's a real shortage happening and awareness is half the battle, really. People just don't know.

10:51

Max: And, you know, it's, for the most part pretty well paying. I get compensated very well and, so I have no complaints, really. I mean, the schedules in aviation, that's one of the things that is hard. Is the schedules can be kind of tough when it when you're running a 365, you know, 24/7 operation. It doesn't stop, you know. Airplanes got to fly. But it's also rewarding in that same way.

11:13

Steve Custer: Well, safety is the FAA's North Star, or our Evenstar in this case.

11:18

Max: Of course, right, and that's hammered into everything that we do. It's a very safety conscious industry and that's another thing that I do enjoy. Safety and technical references, technical data, it's all at the tip top of everything. I like that. I like not having a big margin for error. It's a safety forward industry and I like that a lot. Both in terms of, you know, transportation, safety, safety of the equipment and safety of the people and the workers. You know, where I'm, I work, I'm pretty lucky enough that we have a good safety culture and if something's not right you can just stop the whole operation. That's been my experience, everywhere that I've worked.

11:55

Lucy Jabbour: That's really powerful to hear because people on the ground are the ones who are seeing what's going on, and so, to be listened to, I think, is a huge part of the culture.

12:02

Max: Yeah, absolutely.

12:02

Lucy Jabbour: Max, we like really enjoyed talking to you and having you on. We're so glad that you were able to make some time and, you know, play ball with us and help to kind of spread some information about aircraft mechanic careers.

12:14

Max: Oh, yeah, no, thanks for having me. I really appreciate it.

12:22

Aircraft Mechanic PSA: Looking for a well-paying aviation career that doesn't involve sitting behind a desk or in a cockpit? Learn how to become an aviation mechanic.

FAA-certificated Aviation Maintenance Technicians, or AMTs, are the foundation for the safety and efficiency of aviation. Plus, you could be marketable in just two years. AMT schools offer two-year programs that will give you hands-on experience and result in highly transferable skills that can be used in a broad range of industries. You could even specialize in avionics, balloons and airships, rotorcraft, and drones. Entry level AMT's start out making \$38 or more per hour and it goes up from there. If this sounds good to you, go to faa.gov/mechanics and check out programs at the AMT schools in your local community. You can do it!

13:09

Lucy Jabbour: Thanks for listening! For more information about today's guest, check out [faa.gov/podcasts](https://www.faa.gov/podcasts). Subscribe, like, follow where ever you get your podcasts so you don't miss a single episode. Coming up next week, we're talking about Historically Black Colleges and Universities or HBCUs.

13:26

Various People: There's a lot of diversity on the campus. So, there's a lot people you can relate with, people you can connect with. And then also being around people who look like me, but were also more successful. Just the culture and the diversity. The people; the energy.

13:38

Lucy Jabbour: And we'll be highlighting Hampton University's Air Traffic Control Program.

13:42

Timothy Johnson: Aviation is magic, you know. You got big ole things in the air that shouldn't be flying. It's rewarding and it's exciting as well.