

## Couple Recalls Jet's Flaws Before Crash

By ROBYN MEREDITH  
NEW YORK TIMES  
MAY 22, 1996

ATLANTA, May 21—Just hours before ValuJet Flight 592 crashed into the swampy muck, Pamela S. Hettinger was sitting on the same DC-9, looking out her window high above the Everglades and imagining a similar fate, because she thought the plane was in trouble.

She and her husband, Wayne C. Hettinger, were aboard the 27-year old jet's next-to-last flight.

On May 11, the morning of the crash, the Hettingers boarded ValuJet Flight 591 in Atlanta, bound for Miami. After a quiet flight, the plane began its descent. Suddenly, she said, the cabin lights went dark and the public address system failed. "They had to use a bullhorn to tell people to put their seatbelts back on," Mrs. Hettinger said. She remembers looking outside then with visions of a plunge to her death.

Within 10 minutes, Flight 591 had landed safely in Miami. But Mrs. Hettinger, who flies four or five times a year and had flown ValuJet before without concern, said that she had tried to persuade her husband to leave the plane with her even before they left Atlanta.

She became concerned, she said, after the airplane returned to the gate twice before taking off. "I know accidents happen, but I just feel like that plane should have never left the ground," she said in an interview today. Mr. Hettinger echoed her account in a separate interview.

The Hettingers' recollections provide the first detailed public description of the mechanical difficulties aboard the aircraft hours before it crashed. While Federal investigators are focusing on the possibility that oxygen generators in the cargo hold caused the crash, they have not ruled out other sources of the fire on board including wiring. Shortly after the crash, a Federal Aviation Administration rule took effect requiring airlines that fly DC-9's to check them for chafed wires in the cockpit.

Other passengers on the Hettingers' flight could not be reached for comment, and safety officials had few details about Flight 591. A ValuJet spokesman, Gregg Kenyon also refused to discuss the flight, crashed saying, "We are not able to talk about anything that happened with aircraft 904" after May 9.

But Gregory Feith, the National Transportation Safety Board's lead investigator for the crash that killed 110 people, gave a brief account of Flight 591 at a press conference in Miami several days after the crash.

Before the jet took off from Atlanta "there was a problem with the circuit breakers" for the fuel pumps Mr. Feith said, adding: "A mechanic came on, thought that he had fixed it and got off. The problem had not been resolved and he got back on. The problem was resolved and the aircraft departed."

Mrs. Hettinger recalled watching those events from her seat in the second row of the aircraft in front of its left wing. After the jet pulled back from its gate, she said, its lights went out, the public address system stopped working and, moments later, the engines clicked off. The plane restarted and returned to the gate.

A mechanic boarded and went into the cockpit, then the cabin, Mrs. Hettinger said. After he left, the plane again backed away from the gate Mrs. Hettinger recalled.

Again, the cabin lights went dark and the public address system failed. Flight 591 returned to its gate, and the mechanic reappeared, stayed 15 minutes and left.

"The third time, we took off," Mrs. Hettinger said. The Hettingers learned after boarding a cruise ship in Miami that the plane they had flown ,had crashed.

"That is when it made me a little weak-kneed," Mr. Hettinger said, "because for the life of me I can't see why they ever left again, with all that going on.

## GOP courts former ValuJet chief for Senate

July 28, 2000

By Dick Pettys  
Associated Press

ATLANTA -- The search for a **Republican Senate candidate** headed South Friday after members of Georgia's congressional delegation took themselves out of consideration to challenge Zell Miller for the seat of the late Sen. Paul Coverdell.

**Republican sources said Lewis Jordan, former president of ValuJet Airlines, was among those being heavily courted to run.**

**Jordan, 56, won praise for his public candor in handling the aftermath of the crash of ValuJet Flight 592 in the Florida Everglades in 1996. ValuJet has since changed its name to AirTran.**

Former Sen. Mack Mattingly, who held the Senate seat for one term after he defeated Democrat Herman Talmadge in 1980, was also among those considering a run. Mattingly, a close friend of Coverdell, was defeated in 1992 by Democrat Wyche Fowler, who in turn lost the seat to Coverdell in 1992.

State School Superintendent Linda Schrenko said Friday from her home near Augusta that she probably will decide Saturday whether to enter the race.

"I've got a little kitchen cabinet. ... I've called a meeting for tomorrow and we're going to sit down and talk about it," she said.

Georgia's eight GOP congressmen announced Thursday, after meeting for the third straight night and the fifth time in a week, that none of them would seek the post.

The state party is scrambling to find a credible candidate before the Republican National Convention begins next week in Philadelphia.

Miller, who will hold the seat by appointment until November, already has said he will run in the Nov. 7 election for the right to finish the four years left in Coverdell's term. He is considered a huge favorite.

Rep. Bob Barr was the final GOP congressman to announce he wouldn't seek the seat. All eight congressmen said they would support any consensus choice.

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( BW)(FL-AIRTRAN)(AAIR) AirTran Awarded Florida State Government Contracts

Business & Travel Editors

ORLANDO, Fla.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec. 1, 1999--AirTran has been awarded 82 State of Florida Government Contracts.

The contracts awarded through a bidding process provide for air transportation for travelers on official government business between specific city pairs.

"AirTran is proud to have been selected as a designated carrier of the Florida State Government," said Joe Leonard, AirTran's chairman and CEO. "In addition to recent United States Government travel bids, AirTran has now been recognized specifically by the Florida State Government for dedication to outstanding service and affordable pricing."

The contracts are awarded competitively based on best overall value to the government, taking into consideration flight schedules and price. The contract period runs from Dec. 1, 1999 to Nov. 30, 2000.

Tickets for Florida State Government travel may be purchased by calling AirTran's special government travel desk at 877/468-4492, or through travel agents.

Offering the convenience of easy, same concourse connections in Atlanta, systemwide, AirTran operates over 264 daily departures to 30 cities. AirTran operates over 130 daily departures from Atlanta Hartsfield, the "World's Busiest Airport," as designated by Airports Council International.

AirTran provides everyday, affordable air travel throughout the eastern United States and Midwest, and unlike other airlines, never requires a roundtrip purchase or Saturday night stay. AirTran is the launch customer for the new Boeing 717, the newest, most innovative commercial aircraft to date. AirTran is a subsidiary of AirTran Holdings Inc. (Nasdaq:AAIR).

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KEYWORD: FLORIDA  
INDUSTRY KEYWORD: TRAVEL AIRLINES GOVERNMENT

# [PLANESAFE.ORG](http://PLANESAFE.ORG)

## Florida HB 755 - Dangerous to Passengers

Late May, 1999, Boeing lobbyist Guy Spearman went to the Capitol in Tallahassee and in the final hours of the legislative session, added a major provision to House Bill 775 -- a 50-page bill taking rights away from the people. There was no public hearing and they totally by-passed the legislative committee process. The Florida legislature passed **HB 775, which states that if a plane crashes in Florida and if the plane is over 20 years old, there can be no lawsuits against the manufacturer. It also appears that if a Florida resident is in a plane crash anywhere, and the plane is over 20 years old, the manufacturers have no product liability.** This Boeing corporate welfare amendment will promote dangerous aging aircraft, and not promote safety!

NADA learned about the midnight madness late May, shortly after the legislature signed the bill. Within 36 hours, working with other consumer action groups, NADA participated in a press conference and **publicly asked Gov. Jeb Bush *not* to sign the bill.** After the May 26th press conference, NADA family members went to Gov. Bush's office, and while the TV cameras were rolling Bush refused to meet with our family members whose loved ones had been killed in air crashes, and signed the bill that day.

The following comments are from the press conference on May 26, 1999, plus an Editorial Opinion from Tom O'Mara written after we learned that Bush had signed the bill. Tom has an excellent suggestion that company's who care about their employees should not have their conventions in Florida.

The answer to aging aircraft is to ensure that we have the safest planes possible, and retire them! Even the **Boeing lobbyist Guy Spearman said, "*The fact of the matter is we can't build those suckers to last forever and ever and ever.*"** NADA fears that with no financial responsibility the industry will try unsuccessfully to fly them forever.

Another lobbyist J.M. "Mac" Stipanovich, said, "*I don't know what the poor people got, but the rich people are happy and I'm ready to go home.*"

For further insults to the flying public, Bush said he would ask the Florida legislature to "try" and repeal this provision next year. Please call Gov. Jeb Bush and tell him to repeal the aging aircraft protection act of HB 775 NOW! Call (850) 488-4441, or Email: [fl\\_governor@eog.state.fl.us](mailto:fl_governor@eog.state.fl.us) or [jeb@jeb.org](mailto:jeb@jeb.org) Or write to Gov. Bush, The Capitol, Tallahassee FL 32399-0001, or call 850-922-4441.



## Mixed verdict in SabreTech trial over ValuJet crash

### Company cleared of conspiracy, convicted of mishandling hazardous materials

December 7, 1999

Web posted at: 10:11 a.m. EST (1511 GMT)

[MIAMI](#) (CNN) -- A Florida jury on Monday found airline maintenance company SabreTech Inc. not guilty of criminal conspiracy in connection with the 1996 crash of ValuJet Flight 592 that killed all 110 passengers and crew.

In the first criminal trial over a commercial jet crash, the company was also cleared of making false statements, but convicted of mishandling hazardous materials.

Two former SabreTech employees were also acquitted of conspiracy and falsifying paperwork, as well as all other charges against them.

"We will appeal the guilty verdicts of the reckless charges, and we expect those charges to be overturned," said Ken Quinn, an attorney for SabreTech.

The Phoenix-based subsidiary of St. Louis-Sabreliner Corp. was found guilty on eight counts of mishandling hazardous materials and one count of failing to train employees properly. The verdict followed 12 hours of jury deliberations that began last week.

Investigators blamed the crash on a cargo fire caused by used generators removed by SabreTech from other ValuJet planes and delivered by SabreTech to the ill-fated flight. The generators were classified as hazardous waste prohibited from flying again, but were loaded as cargo by ValuJet workers.

"There was nothing reckless or willful about the handling of these oxygen generators, the company acted in accord with what was then known about oxygen generators, not what we know today," Quinn said. Family members and friends of some the victims of Flight 592 had mixed reactions about Monday's judgements.

"I take it as a dagger in the heart," said Gwendolyn Marks of Miami, whose son Philmore died in the crash.

Laura Sawyer, whose lost two grandparents in the crash, characterized the verdicts as "only a first step." "I'm happy that found them guilty about training," she said. "It shows corporate America once again, that you cannot put the almighty buck before people's lives.

SabreTech faces up to \$4.5 million in fines plus restitution to the victims' families. The company was driven out of business after the crash and must now go through another trial on murder and manslaughter charges.

In July, a federal indictment accused SabreTech, its maintenance supervisor Daniel Gonzalez, and mechanics Eugene Florence and Mauro Valenzuela with conspiracy to put the company's financial interests ahead of safety and making false statements to the FAA and the Department of Transportation. Valenzuela is on the run and faces charges of contempt of court for failing to comply with his conditions of pretrial release.

## Conspiracy or human error?

A SabreTech crew had removed outdated oxygen generators from the compartments above passenger seats in another ValuJet plane and delivered them to the discount carrier for Flight 592 from Miami to Atlanta. But required plastic safety caps weren't installed on the explosive-tipped generators. They were mislabeled as empty, and a ValuJet ground crew loaded them onto the plane.

During closing arguments of the trial the prosecution said the company and its employees knowingly mislabeled the oxygen generators.

But lawyers for SabreTech and the employees argued there was no criminal conspiracy, and said that the employees handled the oxygen generators the best way they knew how at the time.

They also told the jury the employees thought the canisters were to be thrown away, not put aboard the aircraft.

In rebuttal arguments, the prosecution said SabreTech was making excuses and should have known how to properly handle hazardous material.

Questions were also raised about whether the actual cause of the crash may have been faulty aircraft wiring. The FAA has issued two post-crash directives to airlines to make two electrical modifications on DC-9s.

## ValuJet not charged

ValuJet, now merged with AirTran, was not named in the federal indictment. Florida state attorney Katherine Fernandez-Rundle said that after the three-year investigation prosecutors did not believe criminal charges could be brought against the airline.

But in 1997, a National Transportation Safety Board report cited ValuJet for failing to properly oversee its contract maintenance program and ensure that contractors complied with maintenance, training and hazardous material requirements.

In 1998, the FAA fined SabreTech \$2.25 million for improperly preparing the oxygen canisters for shipment on the plane. The generators trigger a chemical reaction that produces oxygen for passengers' use if a plane loses cabin pressure. The reaction produces temperatures up to 500 degrees Fahrenheit (260 degrees Celsius).

*Correspondent Mark Potter and The [Associated Press](#) contributed to this report.*

## Report: FAA finds more safety problems at former ValuJet

Web posted Jan. 11 at 10:14 PM

Associated Press

CLEVELAND -- Federal inspectors have found a number of serious safety-related violations at the air carrier formerly known as ValuJet Airlines, a newspaper reported Sunday.

A ValuJet DC-9 plunged into the Everglades in 1996 shortly after takeoff from Miami International Airport, killing all 110 people on board. A cargo fire on the doomed flight was blamed on parts with falsified maintenance records.

The violations found at the airline, now called AirTran Airlines and based in Orlando, Fla., included falsified documents, improper maintenance, faulty repairs and repeated failures to supervise contractors.

The findings were in internal Federal Aviation Administration documents obtained by The Plain Dealer of Cleveland.

The documents, based on a three-week inspection that ended Nov. 7, show the airline had more serious violations than a February 1996 report that recommended that the burgeoning ValuJet, then headquartered in Atlanta, be grounded.

That warning went unheeded until after the May 11, 1996 crash of ValuJet Flight 592. The discount airline was eventually grounded for more than three months.

Officials with the National Transportation Safety Board believe improperly labeled and stowed oxygen canisters in the DC-9's cargo hold either started or fueled a fire that brought the plane down.

The FAA documents include a preliminary draft of the agency's AirTran inspection report. The draft report mentions numerous safety problems that have been documented in at least four previous FAA inspections and one conducted by the Defense Department.

The draft report, The Plain Dealer reported, alleges:

-- Three instances of failing to properly calculate the proper weight and balance of aircraft to determine safe takeoff and landing speeds.

-- A senior pilot who oversees the qualifications of other pilots falsified information about the experience of an unspecified number of them.

-- Failure to examine seven planes' transponders, which send out altitude and directional information to traffic controllers, after the planes received major overhauls.

-- Improperly trained workers renovated an unspecified number of cabins to make way for larger business-class seats and modify the passengers' emergency oxygen system.

In one inspection, the FAA visited a contractor repainting several former ValuJet Airlines planes with the company's new red, teal and white paint scheme. They discovered that rudders used to steer the planes in flight had been improperly reinstalled.

Margaret Gilligan, the FAA's deputy associate administrator for regulation and certification, said she could not comment until the final report is completed and its findings are validated.

Asked about the inspection, AirTran spokeswoman Lori LeRoy said, "Informally, we understand that everything turned out very well." She declined further comment on the findings.

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., a House aviation subcommittee member, found both the report and the FAA's handling of it disturbing. The FAA has agreed to sit down Monday in a closed-door meeting with congressional staffers.

"It all rather eerily echoes back to that horrible tragedy," DeFazio told The Associated Press. "If these allegations are all true about the serious nature of the defects and the attempts to dilute that, the FAA has got to be called to account and not just the airline."



## FAA finds no significant problems with ValuJet/AirTran

February 27, 1998

(CNN) -- A Federal Aviation Administration report released Friday revealed "no systemic safety problems" with AirTran Airlines, formerly ValuJet.

The agency's National Aviation Safety Inspection Program (NASIP) team "took an extremely conservative approach" to its inspection of the airline, conducted from October 20 through November 7, 1997 and thoroughly analyzed in the months that followed.

Initially, the agency reported 106 problem areas, but the new report said that 60 of those findings "were not substantiated" and were dropped. The remaining 46, the FAA report said, "have either been corrected by the airline or corrective action is in progress."

The report cited the airline for hiring an unauthorized company to paint some of its aircraft and handle some interior modifications, and for failing to update a listing of the weight of some of its aircraft after changing the seating configurations. The report also noted that some flight crew members incorrectly filled out flight time records, and that the airline needs to improve its internal oversight program.

ValuJet, which merged with AirTran and adopted its name last year, was under close FAA scrutiny following the May 11, 1996 crash of Flight 592, which plunged into the Everglades, killing all 110 people aboard. Investigators believe that oxygen generators in the plane's cargo hold ignited a fire that brought the plane down.

ValuJet was not authorized to carry the generators, considered hazardous material, and blamed a contractor for mislabeling and packing the canisters. The FAA has since banned carrying oxygen generators as cargo, and has issued rules requiring smoke detectors in aircraft's cargo holds.

The airline was grounded after the crash, and allowed to fly again later on a smaller scale.



## NTSB Criticizes Airline, Airport

Fri Dec 1 04:18:00 2000 GMT

ATLANTA (AP) - The chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board was sharply critical Thursday of officials at both AirTran and the Atlanta airport for their handling of a jet that was forced to make an emergency landing after fire broke out beneath the plane's passenger compartment.

NTSB Chairman James Hall said the plane was improperly moved and cleaned after the AirTran DC-9 bound for Akron, Ohio, with 92 passengers made an emergency return to Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport on Wednesday. There was smoke in the cockpit and front galley, officials said.

"This was a very serious incident. Both this airline and this airport should know better than to tamper with evidence of a federal investigation of this incident," Hall said.

Hall said that moving and cleaning the fire-damaged plane violated rules of both the NTSB and Federal Aviation Administration and that both agencies were investigating.

Hartsfield officials said they would have no comment until the NTSB completed its investigation.

AirTran said in a statement Thursday night it had and would continue to cooperate with federal officials.

"At no time last evening or today were any actions taken to obstruct efforts by the FAA or the NTSB in determining the cause of the incident," AirTran said.

The AirTran pilot reported that two cockpit circuit breakers blew as the plane reached 4,000 feet. Smoke developed in the cockpit and in the front galley as the plane returned to Atlanta. Passengers were forced to evacuate using emergency exit slides.

An AirTran spokesman said there were no serious injuries, but two emotionally shaken passengers were taken to a hospital.

NTSB spokesman Keith Holloway said that the fire was under the business class section and that "it burned through the floor of the cabin." He said investigators would be trying to learn if the fire had spread to that extent with passengers still on board.

"The fire was very intense in that area, it did breach the fuselage to the point of the smoke being along the outside of the airplane," NTSB investigator Frank Hilldrup said.

Passenger Leslie Brenneman, 63, said he was thankful the pilot returned to the airport. "We thought we weren't going to see our grandchildren again. It was pretty scary," he said.

The fire was the third on an AirTran plane this year, and the fifth for any airline, Hall said.

AirTran, formerly known as ValuJet, changed its name after a 1996 crash in the Florida Everglades that killed 110 people. Investigators said that crash was caused by a fire fed by oxygen generators that were being transported illegally.

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# The Beacon Journal

## **AirTran, government lock horns over fire Akron woman says she saw flames while jet was still in the air**

BY FRANK WITSIL  
Akron Beacon Journal business writer  
Saturday, December 2, 2000

Government and company officials clashed yesterday over whether an aborted AirTran flight to Akron caught fire in the air or on the ground, but at least **one passenger said she saw flames while the airplane was still in flight.**

**National Transportation Safety Board investigators invited the ire of AirTran officials yesterday by comparing Wednesday's flight to Akron to ill-fated ValuJet Flight 592, which plunged into the Everglades in 1996, killing 110 people.**

"It is an example of what could happen," NTSB spokesman Keith Holloway said.

ValuJet bought AirTran in 1997 and changed its name at least partly to distance itself from the Florida disaster.

**Company officials** objected to the comparison. They said the recent fire did not appear to break out until after the plane landed and **charged the NTSB with distorting facts.**

But, Elizabeth Bard, an Akron woman who was aboard the plane, said she saw flames coming through the floor near her before the plane touched down. Had the aircraft been in the air 60 seconds longer, she and some of the other passengers may not have been able to get out, she said.

The plane took off about 3:45 p.m. from Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport. A few seconds later, Bard said she saw a **"big burst of black, billowing smoke," come up through the floor. And the smoke was followed by flames.**

A Daytona Beach, Fla., man who was traveling on the plane Wednesday with an 8-month-old kitten, Bubby, said the experience was frightening.

Shortly after taking off, things started happening, Craig Kerns said. He heard loud noises, the lights blinked on and off, and the **cabin seemed to depressurize.**

"Then I really started getting nervous," he said.

The pilot turned the plane around and landed. Kerns exited the emergency door, walked down the wing and jumped onto the ground. **After leaving the aircraft, he said he could see flames and smell smoke.**

"It's not what you expect to be doing when you wake up in the morning," he said.

AirTran sent him a check for \$1,000 and two free business-class tickets.

The discount-fare carrier makes up 25 percent to 30 percent of Akron-Canton Regional Airport's business and flies more passengers in and out the airport than any other airline.

NTSB spokesman Holloway said the incident is alarming.

NTSB investigators are looking at what may have caused the fire. Explanations under consideration include hazardous materials in the cargo hold and problems with the wiring, Holloway said. No causes have been ruled out, he said.

Yesterday, investigators examined fire damage in the cargo hold and on floors and walls. They also interviewed baggage handlers. On Monday, investigators are expected to listen to the audio on the plane's voice recorder.

The NTSB contends that three of the five fires reported aboard U.S. aircraft this year were aboard AirTran planes. The safety board is particularly concerned by the fires because two of the 15 incidents in the past five years resulted in fatalities -- the ValuJet crash and a Swiss Air flight over the Atlantic that killed 229 people.

AirTran officials, however, only acknowledge one in-flight fire this year, which occurred on Aug. 8. An incident in Orlando, Fla., was merely some sparks and smoke, company spokesman Jim Brown said. And the Atlanta-to-Akron flight is in dispute.

"All I can tell you is based on our experience with those incidents, we see no pattern," he said.

Earlier this week, NTSB Chairman James Hall charged that the airline and crew at Hartsfield had improperly moved and wiped down the aircraft, tampering with evidence.

AirTran, however, fired off a written response that said company officials "fully cooperated" with the board and "take issue with comments made" by the chairman. In addition, the company sent a letter to the NTSB general counsel yesterday accusing the chairman of making "factually inaccurate statements."

Firefighters made a hole in the airplane's fuselage and mechanics covered the hole with plastic and wiped some soot, but did not tamper with the accident scene, the airline said.

Teamsters Local 528, which represents the mechanics and inspectors at AirTran, also questioned the chairman's rebuke in a written statement, calling it "irresponsible."

The union said the NTSB instructed the mechanics to move the aircraft and tape the hole punched into the plane by firefighters. The mechanics wiped the soot from the plane so the tape would stick.

NTSB officials said they will continue to investigate what the airline did to the plane.

Frank Witsil can be reached at 330-996-3748 or [fwitsil@thebeaconjournal.com](mailto:fwitsil@thebeaconjournal.com)

NTSB Identification: **DCA01MA005**  
Scheduled 14 CFR Part 121 operation of Air Carrier AIRTRAN AIRWAYS  
Accident occurred Wednesday, November 29, 2000 at ATLANTA, GA  
Aircraft: Douglas DC-9, registration: N826AT  
Injuries: 1 Uninjured.

This is preliminary information, subject to change, and may contain errors. Any errors in this report will be corrected when the final report has been completed.

On November 29, 2000, at approximately 3:50 pm eastern standard time, AirTran Airways flight 956, a Boeing (Douglas) DC-9-32, N826AT, a scheduled air carrier flight from Atlanta, Georgia, to Akron/Canton, Ohio, returned to Atlanta for an emergency landing shortly after departure.

During initial climb, the flight crew noted numerous circuit breaker trips and illumination of several indicator lights. The crew declared an emergency with air traffic control and requested a return to the airport. The airplane landed safely and cleared the runway onto a taxiway. At some point during the landing rollout and taxi, the flight attendants notified the flight crew of smoke in the forward section of the cabin. An emergency evacuation ensued.

Examination of the airplane revealed fire damage to an area of the left fuselage below and aft of the forward passenger entry door, and to the adjacent forward cargo and main cabin floor areas. Wiring, ducts, and hydraulic lines located in this area were also burned.

NTSB Identification: **MIA00SA181**  
Scheduled 14 CFR Part 121 operation of Air Carrier AIRTRAN AIRWAYS INC. (D.B.A. AIRTRAN AIRWAYS )  
Incident occurred Friday, May 26, 2000 at ATLANTA, GA  
Aircraft: Boeing 717-200, registration: N945AT  
Injuries: 112 Uninjured.

This is preliminary information, subject to change, and may contain errors. Any errors in this report will be corrected when the final report has been completed.

On May 26, 2000, about 1013 eastern daylight time, a Boeing 717-200, N945AT, registered to and operated by Airtran Airways Inc., as a Title 14 CFR Part 121 scheduled domestic passenger flight from Atlanta, Georgia, to Savannah, Georgia, experienced a total electrical failure during rotation and climbout from Atlanta. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and an instrument flight plan was filed. The airline transport-rated pilot, first officer, 3 flight attendants, and 107 passengers were not injured. The flight was originating at the time of the incident.

An FAA inspector who investigated the incident stated that during the rotation and departure sequence the airplane experienced a total electrical failure. The captain's and copilot's liquid crystal displays, all communications and all indicators failed, and the crew squawked 7700 and returned to Atlanta. During the approach, the gear had to be lowered using the alternate gear extension system, since the normal gear extension system had failed. The crew made an otherwise uneventful landing, but the gear doors were damaged during taxi.

NTSB Identification: **MIA00SA147**  
Scheduled 14 CFR Part 121 operation of Air Carrier AIRTRAN AIRWAYS INC.  
Incident occurred Sunday, May 07, 2000 at ORLANDO, FL  
Aircraft: Boeing 717-200, registration: N947AT  
Injuries: 102 Uninjured.

This is preliminary information, subject to change, and may contain errors. Any errors in this report will be corrected when the final report has been completed.

On May 7, 2000, about 2050 eastern daylight time, a Boeing 717-200, N947AT, registered to and operated by Airtran Airways Inc., as a Title 14 CFR Part 121 scheduled domestic passenger flight from Atlanta, Georgia, to Orlando, Florida, experienced smoke in the cockpit during the descent into Orlando. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and an instrument flight rules flight plan was filed. The airline transport-rated pilot, first officer, 3 flight attendants and 97 passengers were not injured. The flight originated the same day, about 1955.

According to an FAA inspector, smoke was observed by the flightcrew coming out of the area of the fuel pump switches on the upper cockpit panel, and the crew declared an emergency and landed the airplane without further incident. During examination by FAA and Airtran maintenance personnel, the logo light switch was found not to be working, and the 1/2-inch square cube switch from the overhead panel associated with the logo light was removed. It contained a 3/4-inch long pin that showed signs of arcing, and some discoloration on the pin. The logo light circuit was disabled by pulling the circuit breakers, and the item was deferred, in accordance with the aircraft minimum equipment list. The switch was retained by the operator and sent to the Boeing Company's laboratory for examination.