

The day KLM dropped hot coffee and tea on my bollocks...

Experienced and Written by Andy Owen



Back in 2000, I used to fly down to Dubai pretty much every 4 weeks.

I first went there in 1996 and had developed quite a client base. I was one of the very first people to introduce the benefits and techniques of direct marketing to a growing Gulf marketplace.

Things were pretty good, I have to say. Dubai was a wonderful place then. Not like the plastic, overpriced La La Land it has become.

I used to fly Birmingham - Amsterdam - Dubai and, because of my frequency, I had become a Royal Wing member, the highest status of the airline.

On Thursday 14th December, I boarded flight KL426 for my return overnight flight to Amsterdam, as I had, many, many times before.

But this flight was going to be different. *Very* different...

The flight had been without incident - and, about two hours out of Amsterdam, the staff starting to prepare breakfast.

I had been working on my laptop, but when I saw the trolleys come out, I stopped working, put my laptop in the overhead bin and starting reading.

I was sitting in an aisle seat towards the back of the plane. The trolley got closer then suddenly the drinks trolley tipped up and deposited the contents of the hot tea and coffee pots all over me.

My chest and lower left arm took some of it, the rest pretty much deposited itself over my over my toddle and two. (Private parts)

Not only was it a shock, it bloody hurt like hell. I never wear underwear when I'm flying, so I was quite badly burned and, my clothes were a complete mess.

The stewardess on the trolley panicked and screamed out loud, which woke up the whole plane, including the dozy Frenchman in the seat ahead of me. It was his foot, sticking out in the aisle that was the reason why the trolley had tipped.

I stood up quickly, got out of my seat, ripped my t-shirt off and tried to manoeuvre my trousers so the hot liquid was not in touch with my bits. The rear galley was very close, so I went in there to get help.

The staff were panicking. They panicked even more when I started to take off my chinos. So, I decided it was best to stop.

They poured me a large brandy and the purser asked for some ice, to put on the burns. The second that the purser asked for the ice, a young lady at the back of the plane, screamed out " do NOT use ice!"

It turned out she was a nurse.

And, with the help of a young doctor, she took control of the situation immediately.

She told the Purser to get the burns kit - and, when it arrived, she then started to treat the burns on my upper body, but, not to put too fine a point on it, she didn't deal with the other sensitive areas of my body.

She was prepared to do it and asked me if I required it, but, as I had had a quick peek and there was no blistering, only redness, I thought it might be prudent for me to do this myself, which I did.

I was SO lucky that these medical experts were close at hand.

As they told me later, putting ice on burns, is the worst thing you can do.

They were both appalled at the naivety of the crew with regards to an incident like this and the treatment I received. So was I, to be honest.

The nurse, in fact, asked to be kept informed of the situation as she wished to provide evidence if it proved necessary.

Which it did. But more of that later.

The chinos I wore that day, were light khaki. So, you can imagine what a state I was in. It looked terrible.

No clothing was made available and I had, in the end, to wrap a blanket around my shoulders, to cover my embarrassment.

I requested that a set of fresh clothes were available for me at Schipol, as I was in a complete mess, had no shirt and later, I needed to walk through the airport to catch a connecting flight to Birmingham.

I supplied my sizes and this was passed to the flight deck to radio on.

When we arrived at Schipol, I was given a tee shirt only and a freshen-up bag. Given my status with the airline, I was both disappointed and very angry, as you can imagine.

I was driven on a buggy towards the Royal Wing lounge, stopping off at a first aid post, which I had requested. When we got there, it turned out to be the wrong one and no one could look at me.

I was still in a fair amount of pain all this time. My skin had blistered and it hurt like hell.

When in the lounge, I was told I could shower. As a Royal Wing member, I obviously knew this.

What was of more importance to me was to get something to ease the pain and, to get fresh clothes to continue my journey.

I got neither.

The KLM staff member suggested I went out into the airport and purchased some items and then I would be reimbursed. This was totally inappropriate in my current state and I told her so. She said it was 'company policy' to do it like this. I requested once again, for her or a member of her team to purchase the items for me.

I did not want to move at this time, because of the pain and the state I was in. Sympathy was given, but nothing was forthcoming.

Their narrative was parrot fashion. Because of KLM's company policy, nothing could be done and eventually the staff member said goodbye and left me in the lounge. There were no arrangements made for a buggy to take me to my gate for the Birmingham flight, which was at the other side of the airport.

I walked there myself, in pain and with badly stained clothes and was hugely embarrassed about it all.

I was the last to board the plane to Birmingham. I had booked seat 1A.

The rest of the plane was settled and everyone in their seats. So, I thought I would hold court for a minute or two. I stood at the top of the plane and asked for everyone's attention.

As you can imagine, my trousers looked incredibly bad. I was most eloquent. I said...

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting. The reason is quite simple and explains why I look in such a state. On my connecting flight from Dubai this morning, KLM dropped the hot tea and coffee pots over my bollocks".

I waited a few seconds for that to sink in...

"Not only that, but they have refused to supply a change of clothes and let me walk across Schipol without assistance, looking like this.

I have had Royal Wing status with them for over two years. So, now you know how KLM treat their very best customers. Be afraid. Be very afraid..."

Then I sat down. During the flight, I became quite a celebrity. A number of people came up for a chat, as they were interested in what happened. So were the crew.

When I arrived at Birmingham Airport, I then had to walk through arrivals to meet my wife and suffered the indignity again, from everyone who saw me.

I won't bore you with the embarrassing rigmarole that happened after I got back and contacted KLM. But, I'm sure you won't be surprised to know, that it took 5 months to get compensation from them.

And that, in the end, took the form of loyalty miles.

They fought like tigers to avoid liability. They reluctantly apologised about how I was treated, but it was hard work for them. They did, of course, blame dozy Francois in the seat in front, for the whole incident.

Can you imagine if that incident happened today? Their feet wouldn't touch. And, it would have cost them a lot more than just miles.

The only good thing that came out of this painful incident, was, that the miles I received, allowed my wife and I to travel first class to Sao Paulo and back, during a wonderful holiday to Brazil, later in 2001.

Enjoying champagne at 35,000 feet, in an otherwise empty first class cabin on the way down to Brazil, my wife turned to me and said:

"This is pretty good, isn't it? Can you get KLM to drop hot tea and coffee on your bollocks every time you fly?"