

# Loxwood pilot lands Virgin flight at Gatwick Airport after technical fault



Loxwood pilot David Williams safely landed flight VS43. Photo by Virgin/PA Wire

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**The Loxwood pilot who dramatically landed a Virgin Atlantic jet at Gatwick Airport on Monday (December 29) has said he was just doing his job.**

In a statement issued as passengers from the flight finally landed safely in Las Vegas, David Williams said any of the airline's pilots would have done the same, and that he was proud of his colleagues.

Mr Williams said: "Clearly this was an out of the ordinary landing, but I was just doing my job and any one of our pilots would have taken the same actions.

"I'm really proud of my colleagues on the ground and in the air and the support they gave me during this event - everyone worked really hard in a difficult situation and we are delighted

that our customers were able to travel to Las Vegas the next day for their New Year's Eve celebrations.”

Virgin Atlantic said Mr Williams had been trying to stay out of the media spotlight over the last 24 hours, and the pilot added he was “keen to spend some private time with my family over the new year”.

A specially scheduled flight meant intrepid passengers took to the skies again yesterday after Monday's flight suffered a major landing-gear fault which forced it to return to Gatwick airport.

Virgin Atlantic confirmed the flight took off at 11:15am on Tuesday, and landed safely at McCarran International Airport Las Vegas at 20:59 GMT.

A spokeswoman for Virgin Atlantic said: “The majority of people did choose to fly - about 95% did.

“Some didn't for various reasons, but I think the majority did choose to fly. About 13 of the passengers went on holiday as crew companions and obviously that original crew weren't travelling any more.”

The spokeswoman said it was standard procedure for a new crew to operate a flight if there is an incident or delay on board.

She added: “We'd like to thank our customers for their support as we understand that this will have been a very upsetting situation for them. We're delighted that they have landed in Las Vegas in time for New Year's Eve.”

Passengers applauded with relief after their stricken Virgin Atlantic jumbo jet landed safely at the West Sussex airport on Monday, and praised the aircraft's pilot.

Travellers, who had had to get into the brace position, spoke of a “textbook landing” and praised the calmness of the cabin crew and the cockpit crew who had got the Las Vegas-bound plane down safely despite one of the aircraft's five sets of landing gear not deploying.

Sir Richard Branson added to the heartfelt thanks expressed by terrified passengers to the crew of the stricken Boeing 747.

The Virgin president said on Twitter: “Well done VirginAtlantic pilots & team for safe & skillful landing of VS43. Thoughts with passengers & crew, thanks for support & patience.”

The 447 passengers were taken to the Hilton hotel at Gatwick Airport overnight before they took off again.

Describing the mood on the plane on Monday, Dan Crane, 24, from Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, said it was “anxious, a lot were worried, some crying. The mood was quiet and (we were) just waiting for the captain's next announcement.”

The jet turned back soon after taking off and circled as it lost fuel ahead of what Virgin described as a “a non-standard landing procedure”.

Dramatic photographs showed the jumbo jet landing with the right-side wing landing gear not deployed.

Trevor Stirling, who was travelling to Las Vegas with his wife Catherine and four other friends to mark a number of 40th birthdays, said: “Once it was over everyone burst into spontaneous applause. There was just palpable relief.”

A Gatwick airport spokesman advised passengers to check with their airlines on the status of their flight.

Captain Brendan O’Neal, chairman of British pilots’ organisation Balpa, said: “These pilots have had to put into practise their years of training and experience to keep their aircraft and passengers safe. They did a very professional job in difficult circumstances.

“Pilots across the UK and across all airlines know that although incidents like this are rare, they could happen to any of us, and we have huge respect for the crews who fly with such skill and professionalism when it is needed.”