

The Trailing Edge

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Sorry, Sir, the Overhead Bin is Full

I was watching a video (https://youtu.be/ZvC8g8ZUm_A?si=j20kA2RIxFoyRid3) about the Lockheed Constellation. An interior shot showed the seats with a large round ceiling above them, filled with nothingness.

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Lockheed L-1049 Super Constellation Cabin. Notice the large, unused volume above the seats. Where do I put my carry-on roller bag? At least you don't have to worry about getting the center seat.

Since this is very unlike the contemporary airline experience, I asked the following question to my favorite airliner historian, **Mike Machat**:

When did overhead storage bins become a thing? Not hat racks, but big enough to put a suitcase in. It seems now that every boarding of an airliner is primarily a big competition over overhead bin space, which is insufficient for every passenger to stuff a bag.

Mike replied with the following response:

That's a great question, thanks. Early airline cabins in the Douglas DC-2 and DC-3 were purposely designed to resemble railroad Pullman Cars with open racks for passenger items like coats, hats, and handbags.

The early-1960s Boeing 707, Douglas DC-8, and Convair 880 had open shelving primarily for blanket and pillow stowage as did the second-generation Boeing 727-100 (1963) and Douglas DC-9-10 (1965).

Later model 727-200s and DC-9-30s, which were introduced in 1967, featured the first overhead bins, although they were about 1/3 the size of today's fully integrated designs.

By the late-1960s, nearly all older jetliner interiors were retrofitted with simple folding-door baggage bins. The Boeing 747, Lockheed L-1011, and MDC DC-10 Jumbo Jets had the first large bins like we have today.

Mike sent the following photos to support his points.



The Douglas DC-2 cabin, built to resemble railroad Pullman Coach cars. The fuselage was only wide enough for 1x1 seating with a central aisle. Notice the open overhead racks for coats, hats, and handbags. You don't have to wait until after landing to experience contents shifting in turbulence.



The Douglas DC-3 was wider than the DC-2, allowing 1x2 seating rows. This picture shows the Douglas DC-4 cabin, wide enough for 2x2 seating rows. Note the overhead shelving full of blankets and pillows.



The Douglas DC-7 was pressurized and significantly faster than the DC-4, thanks to over-stressed R-3350 turbocompound engines, but the cabin was still just 2x2 seats wide. Overhead storage hasn't changed much.



Douglas' first jetliner offering was the DC-8, which increased the fuselage diameter enough to allow 3x3 seating, thus introducing the dreaded center seat. The overhead storage hasn't changed much, now seeming rather minimal for the number of seats. Notice the introduction of the tray table, finally allowing each passenger to participate in the before landing checklist. Without the overhead structure, the reading lights and air conditioning nozzles are installed in the seat backs. This certainly made installing and moving seats around more complicated.



The Douglas DC-9-10 had a smaller fuselage diameter, allowing only 2x3 seating. Did the off-center aisle mess with anybody's head? The overhead shelf has been redesigned to allow overhead lighting and ventilation, as well as that light reminding you to Fasten Seat Belts. However, the blankets and pillows are still prepositioned to fall on your head in turbulence.



A few years later, the Douglas DC-9-30 introduced closeable overhead bins, but at about 1/3 the size of today's bins. You still had to check your bag, but then again, no one had yet figured out how to put wheels on your bag, so you were happy to let someone else carry it. Also, you weren't paying for the privilege of checking it.



The DC-10 was McDonnell Douglas' first wide-body airliner. In this interior mockup, probably of the first class area, we see some small overhead bins, but still too small for your roller bag.



Finally, in this Boeing 787 cabin we see the large overhead bins that we all fight over, large enough to hold your carry-on roller bag. At least the overhead volume is now serving a useful purpose.

- Russ Erb with words and pictures from Mike Machat