



↑ The breathability of fabric makes it the best choice for longhaul seat covers (photo: Lantal)

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Peter Kuhn, Director Sales at Lantal Textiles, confirms that fabric seat covers are generally considered more comfortable on longhaul flights. He notes that many low-cost carriers have selected leather because of lower maintenance costs, although there is a weight penalty as leather covers are twice as heavy as the textile alternative.

Kuhn says the durability of textile covers has increased in the last 10 years and can now be expected to last for up to four years. This is dependent on a number of factors. Covers in economy are more likely to be abused than those in premium classes; as such, the maintenance plan can have an effect. The weave, construction, shape and form of the cushions also affect the way that a material lasts – the tighter the weave, the greater the wear resistance.

Lantal is involved in other transportation markets and Kuhn notes that, because bus and train passengers have the distraction of looking out the window, there is often much more use of brighter designs. This approach would become oppressive in an aircraft cabin after several hours, hence the prevalence of very simple patterns. However, especially in premium

cabins, there is an increasing trend away from a simple repeat of the airline's logo towards much more discrete designs. This new approach includes 3D designs and the use of highlight colours and yarns that sheen to resemble silk. Much has been made of this by Lantal on prestige programmes for leading airlines, with Kuhn agreeing there is crossover from the executive jet market in these cabins.

Most textiles are a blend of wool and synthetic materials. That being said, the company has an extensive research and development programme that is constantly looking for new combinations to improve passenger wellbeing, such as the wicking of perspiration. Other potential applications include anti-microbial treatment and the tackling of a well-known, yet well-hidden, problem: bed bugs.

Lantal works closely with the leading design agencies, becoming involved at an early stage. The first concept studies are converted into CAD/CAM data and used to produce the first samples. This is usually followed by a number of reiterations as the design is finalised, with final production being set up in about 10 weeks.

One such project was the curtain between the upstairs lounge on the A380s of Qatar Airways. The design is attached by magnetic strips, but incorporates soundproofing between the lounge and the economy cabin. The original concept came from PriestmanGoode and was then developed by Lantal and Airbus. More generally, curtains are ready-made and fairly basic, with shorthaul airlines showing a trend to reduce the number of curtain sets per aircraft to save weight and cost. However, there are signs that some airlines are looking at seasonal variations or even event-related themes for curtains. ●

↓ Future seat cover designs could incorporate materials that have a direct effect on passenger well being (photo: Lantal)

