



## **PRESS RELEASE: Virgin Reaches New Heights In Safety with Semmco**



*Bespoke engine and cargo hold access solutions from Semmco improve safety for aircraft engineers whilst improving their productivity when working at heights.*

**Specialist engineering company, Semmco, has recently worked with Virgin Atlantic Airways to design, manufacture and implement a fleet of bespoke access steps and platforms designed to give aircraft engineers at Heathrow and**

**Gatwick Airports easy, safe and flexible access to engines and cargo holds and for general maintenance purposes.**

### **Cargo Bay Access**

Two sets of Semmco Cargo Bay Access Steps have been in use since January 2007 in Virgin's Gatwick hangar, predominantly for 'A' checks on the 747 400s, with one set of steps used for accessing the front cargo bay, and the other for the rear. The adjustable height access steps, which also comprise a platform at the top which docks seamlessly with the opening to the cargo hold to give full fall from height protection, were designed in close consultation with Andy T Currey, who oversees the Tooling & Access Equipment Operations Planning for the airline. Explaining the typical work undertaken using the cargo access solution he says "The Semmco steps and platform enable the engineers to safely access the cargo [freight] bay to inspect the complex system of pulleys, belts and wheels that move the freight around internally in LD3s/LD4s [containers]. Located within the forward freight bay are two fire extinguishers that weigh in excess of 65kg, so it was vitally important for us to have a safe and sufficiently large platform should these extinguishers need to be removed or replaced. Another key factor was having a working platform which is adjustable in height, as the height of the aircraft will differ according to how much fuel remains on board, it is not viable to have any kind of trip

hazard, either a step up or down, when accessing the cargo bay. The lightweight aluminum structure means the access steps can be moved quickly and easily into place and the flexible height of the Semmco solution means the access steps can be used for other wide bodied aircraft such as the A340 300/600 and Boeing 747 and 777. This means that in the event of unscheduled aircraft arriving at the Gatwick hangar, routine inspections and servicing can be carried out as normal. This was recently the case when aircraft were re-routed from our Heathrow base due to a main gas leak we were able to safely carry out “turn-round” inspections as normal.”

### **Engineers Access Steps**

The Semmco variable height engineers access steps, which came into service in Summer 2007, have been designed specifically to provide safe access and working conditions for maintenance tasks such as engine oil changes or complete engine changes on our fleet of 747s, A340 600s and 300s. Two sets of steps are located at Heathrow, and another two at Gatwick, a strategic move that echoes Virgin’s commitment to provide a consistent approach for safety and sharing best practice across all of its operations. Dependent on the amount of fuel being carried, engineers can be working at heights of up to 3m to 4m off the ground when reaching the main engine attachment bolts located inside the top of the cowling. Andy Currey explains the value of the steps in terms of safety by saying “Once again, we needed something flexible in height and upon reaching the top of the steps the engineer becomes encased in a kind of ‘cage’ which extends up by a further 2m to create a high, safe, working area. The engineer is protected by the open cowl on one side, and on the other side by the engine. The side railings can then be folded down to a height of 0.5 m to enable him to carry out his work and also protect him once he starts to move away from the cowling.

Colin Wehrle, Health & Safety & Environmental Risk Advisor for Virgin Atlantic Airways is pleased with the safer working environments which the airline is creating for its staff by working in partnership with Semmco and says “The standard set of steps previously used had been around for 20 or 30 years, but the new generation of Semmco access solutions have been developed in accordance with the new regulations on working at height which came into force into 2005 and incorporate new materials such as aluminium and anti-skid coatings, as well as hand rails to minimise the risk of falling. Following rigorous end user trials, we know that these access steps and platforms have already earned a high degree of acceptance amongst the staff and we are currently developing similar solutions for use on the ramp [apron] during turn-rounds.” A detailed case study on the development of the ramp steps will appear on the UK Health & Safety Executive website in the Autumn under the aviation transport section.

### **Delivering Return on Investment**

Stuart McOnie, Managing Director of Semmco describes the on-going projects for Virgin as “A true partnership. It’s great working with skilled engineers and forward-thinking safety professionals such as Colin and Andy. Together, we can develop access solutions that not only minimise the risks associated with working at heights, but also deliver a return on investment in terms of the flexibility. These innovative systems can be used at various heights and across different aircraft types, reducing the time and manpower traditionally associated with moving heavy steel equipment into place prior to maintenance being carried out.”

The Work At Heights Regulations 2005 place new legal responsibilities on employers to ensure that equipment (such as ladders and platforms) used to facilitate working at any height above ground level minimizes the risk of falling and offers sufficient protection to workers. Falls are the biggest cause of death in the workplace, accounting for 45 deaths and 3351 injuries in 2006/07<sup>1</sup>. Expansion of the aviation industry has brought new health and safety challenges as aircraft turn-around times are reduced, there is increasing competition for space at airports, and there are global pressures on the industry for ever-increasing efficiencies. Activities on the ground airside and during aircraft turn-around are the most hazardous, with falls from heights and workplace transport incidents causing the majority of air transport related accidents reported to HSE.

By teaming up with German partner Zacher, Semmco has brought a complete range of lightweight, compact and variable access steps and platforms to the UK health and safety marketplace. All products are environmentally friendly and are made from high-grade aluminium. The modular design enables various modifications and expansions for specific customer requirements today and in the future. As well as being ideal for use within the rail and aviation industries, these versatile and robust safety solutions lend themselves perfectly to any situation where maintenance engineers are required to work at heights.

Visit the Semmco team on stand No F80/2.

For more information, please visit [www.semmco.com](http://www.semmco.com) or email [carolyn@mconieagency.com](mailto:carolyn@mconieagency.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Source: HSE [www.hse.gov.uk/falls/statistics.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/falls/statistics.htm)

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If you would like further information, please contact Rachael Meyer at The McOnie Agency on 01423 522363 or email [rachael@mconieagency.com](mailto:rachael@mconieagency.com).

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