

Airlines to be 'fully informed' if mid-air Rolls-Royce engine part failure poses wider risk

Passenger plane engine maker Rolls-Royce has pledged to keep airlines "fully informed" if an apparent mid-air part failure poses a wider risk.

The UK firm was reacting to an incident aboard a Cathay Pacific Airbus A350-1000 plane on Monday that saw it forced to return to Hong Kong soon after take-off to Zurich.

Investigations were focusing on a fuel nozzle inside the Trent XWB-97 engine, according to Reuters news agency.

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That is the Rolls-Royce model used on all the A350-1000s.

Cathay Pacific said that 24 flights had been cancelled to allow for checks across its A350 fleet in the wake of the incident.

Sky News has approached UK operators of the A350-1000 planes, which are understood to include British Airways and Virgin Atlantic, for a statement.

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But Reuters, citing sources at international carriers, said that other airlines had not yet been issued any instructions to examine their engines and that data from flight tracking service FlightRadar24 showed planes of other major operators flying normally on Tuesday.

Rolls-Royce shares fell 6% on Monday after the Cathay Pacific groundings first came to light.

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The company said in a statement on Tuesday morning: “Rolls-Royce notes the airline’s statements that it has launched a precautionary inspection of its fleet; and also that, to the extent that any components need replacing, spare parts have been secured and the replacement can be completed whilst the

engine is on-wing.

“As well as providing support and guidance to Cathay Pacific, Rolls-Royce will also keep other airlines that operate Trent XWB-97 engines fully informed of any relevant developments as appropriate.”

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The shares recovered some poise early on Tuesday, rising 4%, after Cathay said it had carried out repairs to three of 48 planes it had inspected, adding that all were expected to resume operational service by Saturday.

Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell, said investors appeared optimistic that Rolls-Royce was not going to be caught up in a new crisis.

He added: "That rebound isn't guaranteed to last, particularly as there is still a lack of detailed information on the incident and how many other engines might be affected.

"Another scandal could scupper Rolls-Royce's recovery efforts. A lot of people will remember the company's previous crisis involving its Trent 1000 engines, which damaged the British engineer's reputation and led to significant extra costs.

"Since then, it has worked tirelessly to get back on track while also trying to make the business run more efficiently and operate in a leaner way."