

Carrying the hopes of a nation

She was big, bold and colourful, and she carried the hopes of the nation - Ndizani, the South African Airways (SAA) 747-300, that was painted in the bright colours of the national flag to take the country's sporting heroes to the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Since the days of Ndizani, the national carrier hasn't had another craft like it, although certain planes have been customised on a much smaller scale for special projects, such as Mandela Day 2011.

Now plans are afoot to paint another aircraft in striking livery for the upcoming Summer Olympics in June/July in London, and SAA, the official carrier of the South African Olympic and Paralympic teams, has called on the public to help out with the design.

[SAA's Paint the Plane competition](#) is underway, and invites young South Africans between the ages of seven and 21 to unleash their creativity and submit a design. The winning entry will be transferred onto an Airbus A340-600, one of the carrier's 57-strong fleet.

Besides the thrill of seeing their design flying all over the world, the winner will also bag a trip for two people, which includes travel, accommodation and stadium entry, to the 2012 Olympic Games.

However, should the winner not be able to attend the sporting spectacular, the ticket will be valid for 12 months although the Olympic entry ticket and accompanying accommodation will be forfeited.

How to enter:

Download the Airbus A340-600 template (PDF, 371K), or redraw it. Email your design to painttheplane@callit-it.com. Or post it to Paint the Plane, Private Bag X33, Bryanston, 2021. Entries close on 4 June 2012. Entrants must have a valid passport, and the winner is responsible for arranging his or her own visa.

Supporting Team South Africa

SAA's decision to paint Ndizani in her eye-catching livery was, according to a statement released at the time, to show its support for the national Olympic team, and secondly, to support Cape Town in its bid to host the 2004 Summer Olympics.

Ndizani (isiZulu, meaning "flying to new heights") turned heads wherever she went, and she was often seen at airports around the world in the late 1990 and early 2000s. She was even spotted on Google Earth once or twice, parked on the runway at the then Johannesburg International Airport.

She was fondly known as the Smartie Box, and South African passengers who flew in her often remarked on how she enhanced their sense of national pride.

In December 1996 she carried members of the International Olympic Committee's evaluation team to Cape Town, as part of that city's 2004 Olympic bid - the event eventually went to Athens.

Ndizani flew commercially for the last time in 2004, after which she was withdrawn from service. After returning to Johannesburg from Sao Paulo on 26 April that year, Ndizani was grounded.

However, nostalgic aircraft enthusiasts who have a bit of money to spend can buy an Ndizani model from various sources, including amazon.com.

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