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How to ship an Audi A7

Moving a sports car from Switzerland to South Africa - in an Airbus A340-300

Swiss WorldCargo has made a name for itself for transporting a variety of niche, care-intensive goods. But a June shipment of an Audi A7, from sunny Zurich to wintry Johannesburg, brings its own set of challenges: Loading and unloading a small, compact sports car to and from a SWISS Airbus A340-300 is no easy feat. Luckily, our Swiss WorldCargo reporters are there to document the experience and report on it.

The start: Stuttgart

The journey begins with an dedicated and special RFS (Road Feeder Service) for cars from Stuttgart, with a truck carrying the just-finished vehicle directly to Zurich. International Quality Service GmbH, a leading logistics provider for special automotive transports by air, ocean, rail and road, has arranged the entire process with instructions for

loading and deloading the car. International Quality Service GmbH has chosen to work Swiss WorldCargo due to its direct connection, reliability, and ability to carry this special cargo.

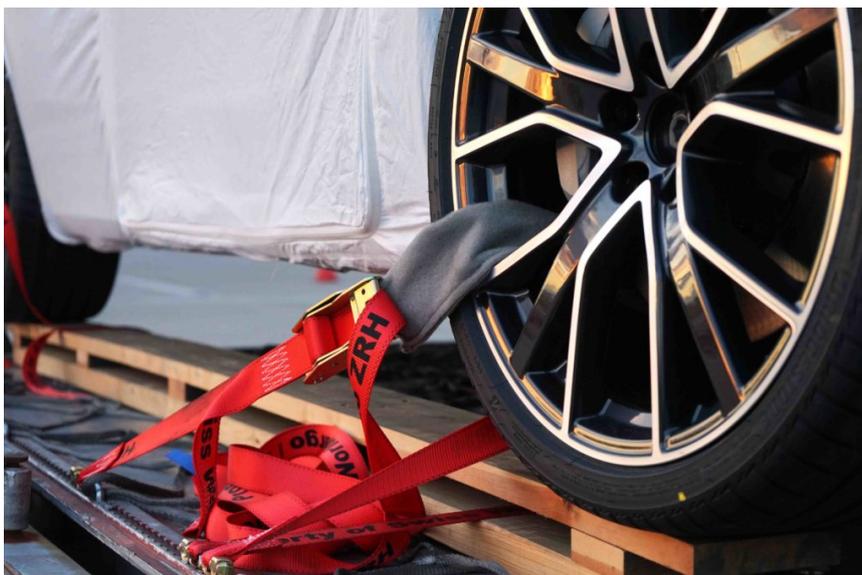
Zurich, Airport: the loading begins

The RFS truck delivers the automobile directly to the Swiss WorldCargo's Zurich Hub, Cargologic. There, the ground handler ensures that it is properly palletized and safe. Given its size, the staff at the cargo warehouse splits the loading of the vehicle over two separate pallets. At 20:30h, the team brings the car to the tarmac. This should provide ample time, given the departure time of flight LX 288 at 22:45h.



Audi A7 sports car waiting to be loaded in SWISS Airbus A340-300 to JNB.

The vehicle is already on the tarmac, parked and ready to go around 9 p.m. The loading crew, consisting of about five ramp workers from Swiss WorldCargo's handling agent Swissport, arrives shortly after and evaluates the best ways to bring this juggernaut into the small space available. After a short discussion, the team begins.



The Audi A7 is on the pallet ready to be loaded.

Over the next forty-five minutes, the group works quickly, but diligently. The loading process brings several challenges: First, the size and weight of the vehicle, especially in comparison to the doors of the A340 cargo hold. The car's windows are completely covered, meaning that one employee is actually inside the car, monitoring for safety purposes. Finally, the team follows a different process here: Normally, teams move pallets directly into a hold, but as this shipment is split due to its size, this is not possible.



The team then loads both pallets onto a high loader, after which three of the crew spend another few minutes manoeuvring the vehicle. This is tricky in itself – the vehicle enters the load facing the aircraft, but must be rotated at a ninety-degree angle to take its position in the hold. In order to ensure it fits properly, the team must then turn the vehicle several times. One cannot underestimate the intensity and difficulty of this work. In the summer heat, everyone present is giving it their all – pushing, pulling and lifting where they can.

Finally, at 22:10h, the vehicle is fully loaded on board. At this time, thirty meters above the tarmac, passengers are already boarding. The Swissport crew quickly finishes loading the remainder of the pallets, which will go onboard. At 22:45h, the vehicle pushes back, beginning its journey to South Africa's largest city.



In the air

For the next 10-plus hours, it is the job of the SWISS cabin crew and pilots to ensure the passenger's safety, well-being and comfort. But, following their arrival in Johannesburg the following morning at 09:10h, their job is finishing up, while that of Swiss WorldCargo continues. The Johannesburg ground handling team, Lufthansa Cargo AG, meets the same issues again: the vehicle is excessively large and difficult to move. Both pallets are once again slowly moved out of the aircraft. Logistically, it remains important that they are shifted inch by inch, until they are loaded onto the high loader, after which they are transported to the nearby cargo hall. 12 hours after start in Zurich, the vehicle is now in Johannesburg.

In Johannesburg

In South Africa, certified professionals will test the vehicle to certify it and ensure it meets all international and domestic regulations, standards and specifications. The process, known as homologation, is crucial for modern vehicles, ensuring that they will meet regulations. These tests are often carried out locally, due to South Africa's strong automotive market and accredited homologation testing services. Authorities there closely evaluate vehicles, after which they can determine if they are fit to operate according to the regulations and standards of different markets.

Johannesburg remains an important destination for SWISS and Swiss WorldCargo alike – popular for tourists exploring South Africa, but equally renowned as a business destination connecting several African states. The automotive sector plays a vital role for the South African economy, and exports of auto parts are a crucial focus for Swiss WorldCargo (roughly 60% of the overall product). However, entire automobiles – especially of this size – offer an opportunity as well as a challenge.

“The shipment of this Audi vehicle, while challenging, again emphasized the importance of teamwork and working closely with our partners on the ground,” explains Cornelia Geyser, Sales Executive South Africa. “And in South Africa we are always ready for new challenges, and will do our utmost to find a way to make things happen.”



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