

Passionate aviator: Cordula Pflaum in uniform at an airfield near her hometown of Bamberg – she is surrounded by powerful engines both at work and in her private life.

The dream of flying

12/01/2026 Flight captain, instructor, speaker: Cordula Pflaum has made it to the top – namely, to the cockpit at Lufthansa. The experienced pilot lives out her passion for powerful engines not only above the clouds, but also behind the wheel of her Macan GTS.

The numbers speak for themselves: Cordula Pflaum has already logged 18,000 flight hours, which is more than 750 full days in the cockpit. That's around two years of her life spent above the clouds. She had always known that she wanted to explore the world from a bird's-eye view. Born in northern Germany in 1969, Pflaum spent her childhood in Ravensburg.

Her father, too, had a fascination for aviation and served as a member of the Lufthansa ground staff in Cologne from 1961 to 1966. Pflaum can no longer remember whether it was the exciting tales her father told or a bedtime story that inspired her to dream about flying as a child. Regardless, soon after finishing her schooling at the age of 19, she was one of the few female candidates in the male-dominated field of aviation to pass the pilot aptitude test and began her training in 1990. At the core of her journey was always the thought, "I never wanted to be perceived as a woman who flies. But rather, a

person who flies." Just two and a half years later, Pflaum was one of Lufthansa's first female pilots and ten years later was promoted to captain, switching to the left-hand side of the cockpit. "I'd always had big dreams. Both flying and teaching had been on my bucket list since the beginning of my career."

Pioneer in a male-dominated field

But this path, in particular, was filled with obstacles. Time and time again, she was confronted with the preconceived notion that men in the aviation sector wouldn't accept a woman as an instructor. But she didn't let that get in her way, and in the late 1990s Pflaum paved the way for her female successors as the first female instructor at Lufthansa. She's now one of six women in this position and wants to continue being a role model. "Changes in language and visibility are key to breaking through old patterns," she says. Holding back is the wrong approach. "Young women should raise their voices today and in the future. That will open up opportunities to them that our mothers could have only dreamed of."

In addition to her activities as a captain and instructor, the 55-year-old is also a consultant for management issues at companies and shares her experience. As an expert in overcoming critical situations, she has a wealth of experience to draw from. At Lufthansa, Pflaum has the official title of Critical Incident Stress Management officer. The idea is that pilots should be able to administer psychological first aid to their colleagues in crisis situations. "The aim in the air and on the ground needs to be psychologically safe teams that work well together and look after each other in a productive work atmosphere far from hierarchies," says Pflaum.

One of these critical situations occurred in the wake of the tragic crash of a Germanwings airplane in the western Alps in March 2015, in which all 150 passengers lost their lives. "After an accident like this, it's important to offer support to the crews that were not involved directly. And here, talking is everything. I'm generally confident that we can always overcome difficult situations. And I'd like to pass this self-confidence on to my colleagues." But that's not all she does. Cordula Pflaum is also a speaker on the topic of aviation and author of the book *Good day, this is your captain speaking.* But where does someone who's constantly traveling for readings, interviews, and flights actually call home? For Pflaum, home is her converted barn in the Bavarian town of Hallstadt near Bamberg, where she has lived for more than 20 years with her husband, two daughters, and a Bavarian Mountain Hound that goes by the name Benni. Even if she's quick to emphasize that the world is her home, she views this statement as a credo for her life. "I interact with people accordingly," says Pflaum. "Regardless of where they come from or live, I always approach them with curiosity and openness. I try to learn from them." She has passed this international curiosity on to her daughters, both of whom are passionate about flying with her and thus exploring the world.

The world's most beautiful office

Her first solo flight is a moment she'll never forget. "It's indescribable. Taking off alone, without a flight

instructor at your side, that's an extraordinary experience." And even after more than 30 years of service, her passion is still unwavering. "I'm passionate about flying because I love operating technology," says Pflaum. "Because I like powerful engines." Gliding, for example, wouldn't be her cup of tea. So it only makes sense that she would own a vehicle with a high-performance drive in her personal life. The commute from her home in Bavaria to the airports in Munich and Frankfurt am Main puts around 60,000 kilometers on the odometer of her Macan GTS every year. Early in her career, she came to realize that the thrust of a VW Beetle just wouldn't cut it after a five-day business trip in the jet, which is why she now drives something more dynamic, the GTS. What Porsche means for her in just a few words: "clean, elegant, and sleek – through and through."

Based on her total flight hours above the clouds, the long-haul pilot has circled the earth 270 times. Nevertheless, taking a seat in the cockpit is still an exciting experience for her. And anyone who assumes that autopilot leaves her with little to do during the flight is sorely mistaken. "Autopilot usually takes over the simple tasks shortly after takeoff, which means maintaining course, altitude, and speed." But Cordula Pflaum is responsible for critical moments like responding to different weather situations, navigating turbulence, coordinating with air traffic controllers, and monitoring fuel consumption. She doesn't have the words to describe the most unforgettable moments in the air, as breaking through cloud cover and the view of the northern lights, sun, moon, and starry sky are simply inspiring and breathtaking on every flight. For Pflaum, her cockpit is "the world's most beautiful office."

Heavenly highlights

But there have been a few highlights over the years. "For example, the border between Pakistan and India en route to Delhi is an extremely long line of lights," says Pflaum. The border between the two countries, which is nearly 3,000 kilometers in length, is one of the few borders that's actually visible from space at night. But what have also stayed with her are moments that were especially demanding from a pilot's perspective, whether it's airports located at high elevations like Addis Ababa in Ethiopia (at 2,300 meters) or the usually cloudy Kathmandu in Nepal. And even if she's had the opportunity to fly over and visit many unique places around the world, her bucket list is far from completed. Bhutan, Greenland, Japan – Cordula Pflaum has so much more exploring to do.

Info

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Path: The dream of flying/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Model Planes, 2025, Porsche AG

Subline: Whether Airbus A320, A340, A350, or Boeing MD-11: Cordula Pflaum has been living her dream of flying for 30 years.

Path: The dream of flying/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Cordula Pflaum, Flight captain and Speaker, 2025, Porsche AG
Subline: Above the clouds in her career, down to earth in her private life: Cordula Pflaum lives in a converted barn in Hallstadt near Bamberg with her husband, two daughters, and Bavarian Mountain Hound Benni.

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