

A close-up portrait of James Alexander Strong, a man with short, light-colored hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue.

STRENGTH IN MANAGEMENT

JAMES ALEXANDER STRONG AO

JULY 1944 - MARCH 2013

James Strong was a key figure in the transformation of Australia's modern aviation industry through his role in overseeing the merger of Australian Airlines (formerly TAA) with Qantas and the public float of the international carrier.

James was born in Lismore, New South Wales, on 31 July 1944 and was educated at Lismore High School and Tenterfield High School. At the age of 16 he was selected to undertake training at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. During his fourth year he decided that a military career was not for him.

He instead completed studies at the University of Queensland and the University of Sydney. He qualified as a barrister and was admitted to the NSW Bar in 1976.

In 1981, James started his business career with Nabalco, and by 1983 he was Executive Director of the Australian Mining Council.

Three years later, he took on the role of Chief Executive Officer of Australian Airlines – formerly TAA. He later stated that he "... didn't know anything about airlines, but they convinced me it didn't matter".

From 1986 to 1989, James spearheaded the transformation of Australian Airlines into a more streamlined operation, with a strong customer focus. Over this period, Australian Airlines developed its network of feeder routes across regional Australia through investment in smaller airlines.

It was during this period he donned his distinctive bow tie.

In the early 1990s, James became national chairman of the law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth, and in 1992, managing director of DB Breweries Group in New Zealand.

In 1993, he returned to the aviation industry as CEO of Qantas and oversaw the important merger of Qantas and Australian Airlines. The regional network of routes and aircraft he had developed in his time with Australian Airlines became the core of regional carrier Qantas Link.

He was also at the helm for the public float of the international carrier in 1995. Within a year, Qantas had overtaken Ansett in the domestic market. He was also responsible for ordering the next-generation of aircraft for Qantas.

When James retired as Qantas CEO in 2001, revenue had reached a record \$10.2 billion and the board had agreed to renew the Qantas fleet for the 21st century with the groundbreaking Airbus A380 aircraft. He re-joined the Qantas board as a non-executive Director in July 2006 where he continued to make a major contribution to the airline's success

In 2001 he was awarded the Centenary Medal and in 2006 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for his services to business and aviation.

Outside of aviation, James was a director of the company that oversaw MotoGP and was a member of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation. At the time of his death he was chairman of V8 Supercars and on the organising committee of the 2015 Australian and New Zealand Cricket World Cup. He was also the Chairman of retailer Kathmandu.

James Strong died at the age of 68 from lung complications following surgery on 3 March 2013 at Sydney. He is survived by his two sons Nick and Sam and their families.

As a salute at his funeral, a Qantas Airbus A380 superjumbo flew low over Sydney's CBD.

In paying tribute to James, Qantas Airways CEO Alan Joyce said:

... quite simply, James has made Australia a better place for all of us. In aviation circles, James Strong will be remembered as a giant of aviation history and of Qantas history.

The Australian Aviation Hall of Fame proudly inducts this "giant" of Australian aviation history, James Strong AO.

