

FLYING TO NORWAY

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As a polio survivor with limited vital capacity*, I have used the BiPAP® S/T (Respironics Inc., www.respironics.com) for about 10 years. I need ventilatory support when sleeping or just lying down. I traveled extensively with the BiPAP but, at age 82, as my strength (and most importantly, that of my wife and helpmate) declined, the weight of the BiPAP became a major factor in planning future airplane travel.

The inability to tolerate low airplane cabin pressure, as my breathing became further impaired, also deterred longer airplane flights, particularly for those longer than a few hours. If I remained seated, not reclined, I managed on short flights. But when I ate a meal or exerted myself in any way, my oxygen saturation dropped and my heart rate jumped.

A recent trip to Norway occurred because of two factors: the use of a lightweight bilevel unit and the newly available 110V power in the airplane cabin. The KnightStar® 330 (Puritan Bennett, www.puritanbennett.com) weighs only 2.7 lbs, with dimensions of 3.75”H x 8.25”W x 5.62”D.

I flew SAS from Seattle to Copenhagen nonstop, a 9½ hour flight, on the Airbus 330, followed by an 80-minute flight to Bergen, Norway. **The Airbus 330 features 110V power at the business class and “economy extra” seats.** The latter is a new category that costs less than business class but still considerably more than economy/coach. I felt it was worth the extra cost to have the power available. The power was installed primarily for the convenience of computer users, but the out-

lets can fulfill the electrical requirements of some ventilators.

I placed the KnightStar on the floor in front of me and plugged it into an outlet in the armrest. The increased seat pitch (five inches more than in economy class) added a little more floor space. I used my Mirage® nasal mask (ResMed Corporation, www.resmed.com) because its hose connection can point directly to the floor. I had purchased a manual resuscitator bag – just in case – but decided it was too bulky to carry and my need for it unlikely.

Preliminary communications with the SAS Medical Department were necessary to approve my use of the KnightStar. Their Copenhagen home office consulted with Puritan Bennett, the manufacturer, about machine specifications and other engineering details. I obtained a letter of approval from the SAS Medical Department, even though I was informed that it wasn’t necessary because the approval would be entered in my flight record.

When I boarded the plane, the cabin personnel asked to see the unit and to show it to the Captain. They were most helpful in making certain that I had the correct plug-in adapter and that the machine operated properly. (I received the impression that SAS, and probably other airlines, has a list of ventilatory equipment that is pre-approved for use in the cabin, but the KnightStar hadn’t been included yet.)

It is encouraging that some of these new technological developments make travel easier for ventilator users. Our Norwegian journey was successful. ●

***Vital Capacity (VC):**
Maximum amount
of air expired after
maximal inspiration.