

THE NATION

Thai official cites thruster in 767 crash

By Steve Marshall
USA TODAY

The crash of a Lauda Air 767 in Thailand May 26 was caused by a failed engine thrust reverser, a Thai official said Monday.

The statement by Thailand's chief accident investigator, Thai Air Chief Marshal Suthep Theparak, is the most definitive yet on the cause of the crash, which killed all 223 people aboard.

Today in Seattle, airline owner Niki Lauda will test the theory of the crash cause by "flying" a 767 in a simulator programmed to duplicate the conditions under which the plane crashed.

He said "it was obvious" the thrust reverser caused the crash: "I was down there at the scene hours later and the left engine was in thrust reverse," said Lauda, a former race-car driver who pilots 737s and 767s for his Austria-based airline.

U.S. transportation agencies and plane maker Boeing aren't commenting yet on the cause of the crash.

The National Transportation Safety Board said tests have shown that inadvertent use of the reverser — an auxiliary brake that redirects some of the engine exhaust to help slow a plane — can cause a jet similar to

Boeing's 767 to become uncontrollable.

"It becomes unstable and uncontrollable, and it causes a crash," NTSB spokesman Brent Bahler said.

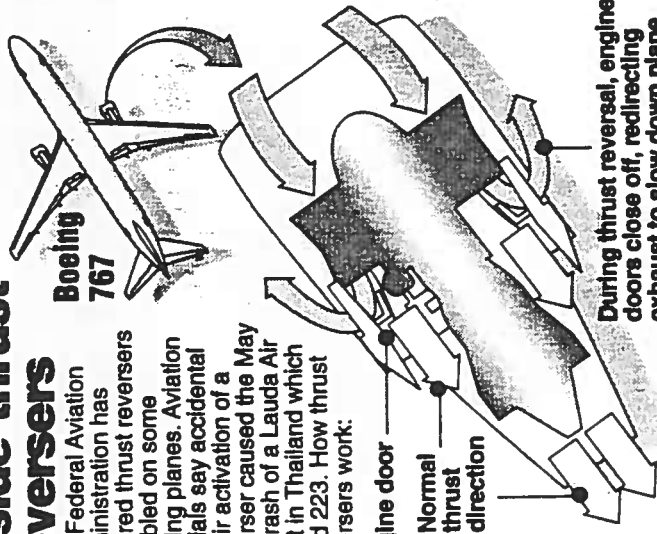
Thrust reversers aren't supposed to activate while the plane is airborne, although former airline pilot John Ferguson said, "Anomalies happen."

The crash — the world's 12th-worst commercial aviation disaster — was initially blamed on a bomb, partly because of the speed with which the airliner was destroyed.

Three Americans were aboard the jet.

Inside thrust reversers

The Federal Aviation Administration has ordered thrust reversers disabled on some Boeing planes. Aviation officials say accidental in-air activation of a reverser caused the May 26 crash of a Lauda Air flight in Thailand which killed 223. How thrust reversers work:



Source: NBC News, USA TODAY research

By Marty Baumann, USA TODAY