**AAdisadvantage? (from 1980-2018)**

American Airlines(AA) came up with a consumer mileage program to reward their frequent flyers back in 1980. They called it AAdvantage. Unitied Airlines then started a similar program named Mileage Plus. I was making many flights from Dulles to Dallas at the time. At first there were some nice bonuses. I sent my parents on first-class, non-stop from LA to Dulles in northern Virginia. They really liked that. I never found first class travel to be worth much since the meal and more seat space wasn’t that great and the free alcohol had negative value since you had to smell the alcohol from your neighboring flyers.

CitiBank then came up with the AAdvantage Visa credit card to reward users with one mile per dollar spent. That is about equivalent to one cent per dollar. Due to the 18 month expiration clause for the mileage, this was easy way to preserve the mileage when no flights were taken on that airline. My friend, Jim, found himself losing 300,000 miles because for about two years, he had not made any United Airlines flights. He has not flown United since then. Delta has the better deal; their miles never expire and their American Express credit card gives holders a free companion ticket each year which appears to be mostly unrestricted. Southwest also appears to have a better program and overall has attracted flyers which do not mind the extra stop that is usually needed to get across the country.

Aha, just try to use the mileage. For first class travel, you can get a good deal, but I find that first class is over-priced. Most of the flights offered for the minimum mileage were off-hours or unreasonable connections. Direct or non-stop flights between two airports were always priced at the premium rates which cost double mileage. Every time I thought of using mileage, I found inconvenient flights so, after a while, I forgot about even trying to find a mileage flight. As time went on, the mileage costs in real dollars added on went up. There was the $75 fee for flights less than three weeks away, added taxes for the given routing, and really high additions for some foreign airports. My prejudice was that I refused to use mileage if the value was less than 1 cent per mile used. I think anyone is doing well to get 2 cents per mile. My normal value for mileage when used is somewhere around 1.5 cents per mile.

However, there is the economic value over time concern. Accrued mileage does not earn interest. Meanwhile, the relative value of money goes down. Had the mileage been used, the money saved could have been invested at a much greater annual return. My expectation was that the prices of airline tickets would get substantially higher. The reality is that airline pricing has stayed relatively static over time as discount airlines for many years have reduced the actual price of tickets on many commonly used routes. The cost of flying into small airports, like International Falls, Minnesota, has risen substantially as has the mileage cost to get to such places.

Although I have been able to get good value from my United program, and even better value from my Delta program, American has been an ongoing problem to use. I should have just given up years ago and accepted the one cent per mile value, but I keep thinking I can do better. There are now way too many miles in my account and I still can’t find a way to use them. The rules keep changing and now even 1.5 cents per mile is really doing well. Even the miles that accrue into my account have changed; now the value is based on the ticket cost not the mileage flown. In prior times, I could collect 1 mile per dollar spent on the ticket and 1000’s of miles for the mileage flown. Now, it is just 2 miles/dollar.

Why have I let this issue go on since 1980? The only reason that I can conceive is that I have been a victim of the gambling mentality; I think that the value of miles is far more than the actuality. I should really be using a credit card that just gives back the 1 cent per dollar value and get rid of the waste-of-time that attempting to use miles causes. All I need to do that is to spend that accrued mileage on an airplane ticket, so I will not lose the value. Ah, easier said than done. I finally managed to get rid of my United credit card since their bank association had high annual fees, ridiculous interest charges, and poor control of fraudulent charges. My next goal is to dump my American Citibank credit card. I will keep Delta as I have used the mileage successfully to go to South Africa and Brazil at about 2 cents/mile. The companion fare also gets used each year to fly across the USA.