

# ISASTER

of London firms are opposed to it, only 1% of the Institute of Directors are behind it; a third of current eco catastrophe? **Michael Meagher** on the five people who are pushing for the third runway



Above: Rafael del Pino, president of Ferrovial, at his wedding to Astrid Gil Casares in June 2006



## RAFAEL DEL PINO

**Chairman of Grupo Ferrovial**

Ladies and gentlemen, feel his pain. When BAA, which owns Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, was bought in 2006 by Señor del Pino's family construction firm Ferrovial, the Spanish tycoon seemed to be on to a winner. He paid £10.3 billion and encumbered BAA with almost the same amount of debt, and had no previous experience of running airports. But interest rates were low, the economy was booming and BAA's landing fee incomes were guaranteed. In the first six months of new ownership, BAA returned a profit of £1.3 billion. Then along came the credit crunch, hand in hand with a dawning realisation of the magnitude of his task of turning around the flagship, Heathrow.

This was an airport that was not so much a gateway to the Third World as part of it. Forget carbon offsetting and noise. The numbers no longer looked so good. The Ferrovial share price halved and debt refinancing plans were put on hold. Peripheral parts of BAA have already been sold off. There has even been talk of having to sell Gatwick. (Probably good news for consumers – competition at last.)

Señor del Pino is now hanging his hopes of a revival – and an increase in his £2.7 billion fortune – on last month's opening of Heathrow's Terminal 5. And the green light for the third runway. His concern is the welfare of the family firm rather than that of the planet.

How happily it had begun. The 50-year-old road and railway builder snapped up BAA in the face of fierce competition, just days before his 1,000-guest wedding in Chinchon, to diplomat's daughter and former investment banker Astrid Gil Casares. It was the Madrid-based del Pino's second marriage, his first wife and the mother of his three children having died. 'It is a great responsibility,' he said of the airports.

Described as bookish and retiring, del Pino Jr is less flamboyant than his father, who founded Ferrovial more than half a century ago and only gave up the reins in 2000. Rafael del Pino Sr is known in Spain as 'El rey de los ladrillos' – the king of bricks. He began his career as a railway engineer who was paid the equivalent of a penny for every track sleeper he laid. Ferrovial specialises in

transport infrastructure and now employs tens of thousands in 40 countries. The brick king was able to afford an £8 million yacht, on which he entertained the Spanish king.

Del Pino Jr, the eldest of five children, was made to begin at the bottom, building roads in Libya. Today he is said to stalk anonymously through Heathrow, no doubt marvelling at the degradation and doing mental arithmetic. So if you are at Heathrow and see a well-dressed Spaniard with his head in his hands, he hasn't necessarily missed his plane. He could actually own the airport.

## WILLIE WALSH

**Chief executive of British Airways**

Nobody is more vocal in his support for a third runway. Nobody is more desperate to demonstrate that it can be tolerated. When Walsh became the boss of Britain's flag carrier BA three years ago, he bought a house in Twickenham right under the existing flightpath. What did he think of the noise? 'I put in double glazing and it was fine,' he has said.

You bet it was. In fact, it's a wonder that Walsh, 46, didn't actually throw open the existing windows, sit back and enjoy the racket. He is a plane nut, a former airline pilot who learned to fly at the age of 17, before he even got his driving licence.

Walsh comes from a middle-class Dublin background. Once he had experienced the Irish rite of passage as an altar boy, he joined the national carrier Aer Lingus as an air cadet. There, he became a representative of the pilots' union – ironically, given BA's own recently threatened pilots' strike. But Walsh was meant for even more elevated office. At just 39, he took over the running of the airline, and at a dreadful time. Terrorists had just flown two planes into the Twin Towers. Other companies were going to the wall. But Walsh preached 'adapt or die', cut nearly 40 per cent of the workforce, sold off its corporate artwork and turned Aer Lingus into a no-frills operation.

It worked. Losses became profits. But thanks to his savage approach to cost-cutting, he earned the nickname of 'The Slasher'. When he got the Aer Lingus job, he announced that he drove a ten-year-old Honda Prelude. Some pleasure was derived from occasional games of golf and football.

That approach hasn't changed since he won the