

The Great Airport Security Race

FORTUNE SENDS TWO REPORTERS TO INVESTIGATE WHETHER THERE REALLY IS A BETTER WAY TO FLY.

LESS TIME IN THE SECURITY LANE means more time to sleep.” “Less time in the security lane means fewer missed flights.” “Less time in the security lane means more time for breakfast with my kids.” More than six years after Congress created the torture chamber that is modern-day airport security, those customer testimonials for the Clear registered traveler system have gone from sounding like saccharine company-approved marketing materials to downright sexy. After all, Clear, run by publishing magnate Steven Brill, promises that after forking over \$128 a year and submitting to a background check, fingerprinting, and eyeball scans, you can be through security in about four minutes at any of the air-

ports where they operate. We were skeptical; Clear, the largest of the three companies that offer fast-track service through airport security lines, is only in 16 airports, many of which already have shorter lines for elite frequent fliers. So what's the value add? To find out, *Fortune* sent two ace reporters on a one-day, 4,141-mile trek to test it out at four airports. (We woke up at 4 A.M. and got back home at 3 A.M.) While our Clear card carrier saved only an average of 9¼ minutes per airport, he felt much more relaxed—and was able to enjoy a few extra margaritas waiting for his colleague to catch up. Read on for the play-by-play of our tortoise-and-hare tour through airport hell. —Barney Gimbel and Jia Lynn Yang

<p>4:55 A.M. New York, Kennedy</p>	<p>Minutes in security ↓</p>	<p>No Frills ↓</p>	<p> Clear Card</p>
<p>Barney Jia Lynn</p>	<p>18 1.5</p>	<p>The line is 50 deep and 18 minutes long. “They torture you right till the end, don’t they?” mutters one guy. Yup.</p>	<p>Jia Lynn Barney</p> <p>The stares feel like daggers as the Clear employee whisks me to the front of the line. I’m through in less than two minutes.</p>
<p>8:04 A.M. Washington, Dulles</p>	<p>5 2</p>	<p>A stroke of luck! The commoners’ line is fast here. I steer clear of a woman with a stroller and get through in five minutes.</p>	<p>The six Clear staffers here seem bored. One carries my bag, another totes the bins with my computer and shoes. I feel very Brangelina.</p>
<p>1:50 P.M. Orlando</p>	<p>9 1.5</p>	<p>A TSA staffer directs me to a line twice as long as the others. I panic and go back. My right shoulder hurts from my carry-on.</p>	<p>I get through in a minute and a half—and feel a sense of schadenfreude for the family with two crying kids and a cat that almost leaped out of the owner’s hands.</p>
<p>5:30 P.M. Denver</p>	<p>13 3</p>	<p>By the time I look for Barney, he’s through. I feel a pang of jealousy—and stand in line for ten more minutes.</p>	<p>By the time Jia Lynn finds me, I’ve drunk a margarita and polished off the chips and salsa. I order round two—she looks like she needs it.</p>

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JASON LEE