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## Taking off

THE gap between the upbeat sales and profit figures of British commerce and the official and survey data is a puzzle.

After the tearaway Christmas sales figures from retailers (continuing to roll in), airlines are demonstrating that traffic is soaring. Putting three years of largely Covid-19 related losses behind it, no-frills carrier Easyjet is forecasting a return to profit this year, sending the shares 10pc higher.

Over the last three weekends, passenger numbers have hit record levels. As the summer approaches, Easyjet is rolling out ever more flights. Personally, I was amazed to find that a flight to a Canary Islands destination next month was almost booked out.

Consumer confidence, according to surveys, has been, and remains, at a low ebb.

The Bank of England has been frightening the country with its warnings of a squeeze on real incomes.

Really? Easyjet chief executive Johan Lundgren says he is surprised by the resilience of demand. He is not alone. Ryanair last week announced record bookings and the shares of all the UK and Ireland-based carriers have been rising strongly.

That does not mean all is running smoothly. As a BA passenger to Prague on Sunday, I was held up for four hours amid a succession of ever less believable excuses ranging from a crew member stuck in Edinburgh, to fog, ice and missing documents.

We were then comforted on board by the slimmest bottle of water ever seen and a food service which consisted of half a dozen mini-pretzels.

If BA shrinks it any further, the bag will be empty. So much for that old, vanishing friend: customer service.