

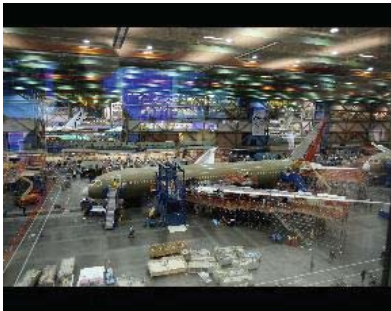
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Boeing Says Delayed 787 Is Capable of Flying Today (Update3)

By Susanna Ray and Rishaad Salamat - June 16, 2009 14:50 EDT



Boeing Co. 787 Dreamliner assembly

June 16 (Bloomberg) -- Boeing Co. said its delayed 787 Dreamliner would probably be capable of flying right now after sailing through some of the last remaining ground tests.

“I personally believe the airplane could fly today,” [Scott Carson](#), head of Boeing’s commercial-airplanes unit, said in a Bloomberg Television interview. The plane cleared testing that simulates flight conditions and multiple systems failures “in a much better condition than we’d anticipated,” he said.

Testing aside, the executive said Boeing remains “very disappointed” that the Dreamliner is running two years late following development and production glitches that have ceded ground to European rival Airbus SAS. Even after its maiden flight the plane faces an ambitious certification process to meet a target of service entry some time in the first quarter.

Carson, who spoke at the Paris Air Show, said Chicago- based Boeing didn’t want to rush the testing process just for the event, which is the world’s largest aerospace exposition, and that the Dreamliner “definitely will fly” this month.

“A lot of people have said, ‘Why aren’t you flying it at the air show?’” Carson said. “But the worst thing any manufacturer could do is use an event to drive you into flying an airplane without having done all the special checks. We don’t want to take shortcuts.”

Investor confidence in Boeing, which has lost half its value since the first 787 delay in 2007, won’t be restored until the plane takes to the skies, said [Bill Alderman](#) of Alderman & Co. Capital, a broker specializing in the aerospace industry.

Emotional Day

The Dreamliner’s first flight “will be an emotionally intense day for everyone,” [Pat Shanahan](#), Boeing’s head of airplane programs, said in a briefing at the Paris show.

A flight-readiness review will be conducted on June 20, followed by a “final gauntlet” trial of the power system, flight controls and avionics and a high-speed taxi test where the wheels may briefly lift off the runway.

“Then we’ll go flying,” Shanahan said.

Flight tests for the plane, which uses an all-composite design to help cut fuel consumption by 20 percent compared with existing models, according to Boeing, will not take much longer than that for the 777, which entered service in 1995 and is made largely of the traditional aluminum, Carson said.

“We’re going through a detailed engineering review with the pilots, with the design team, to make absolutely sure the airplane is the way we want it to fly,” he said. “We believe we can get this done in the nine months we’ve got.”

February Debut

Boeing has already done extra ground testing during the delays in order to minimize the time until the plane’s service entry. The initial customer, Japan’s All Nippon Airways Co., says it has been told it will get the first in February.

While the Dreamliner is the company’s fastest-selling model with 865 orders, delays to the plane have allowed Airbus to close the gap, racking up 483 orders for the competing A350, which will enter service three years later in 2013.

The U.S. company is also working with its suppliers on the Dreamliner to help them through the recession, and problems have been resolved “for the most part,” Carson said.

The manufacturing process counts on vendors from Italy to Japan to gather parts and build large sections of the aircraft, which Boeing machinists will assemble in just three days.

“Cash is tight for everybody,” he said in the interview. “We’re staying very closely engaged with them, working through the bottlenecks. We all want to get this airplane delivered.”

747 On Schedule

Boeing is also on course to fly its new 747-8 freighter by the year’s end, program chief Shanahan said. The first plane, the latest version of the 40-year-old jumbo jet, is more than 50 percent assembled, with three others also part built, he said.

The design for more than 30 percent of the 476-seat 747-8 Intercontinental, the replacement for Boeing’s 747-400 passenger plane, has also been completed, with the engineering “better than planned,” the executive said.

Boeing said yesterday that it was looking at building a new wing for its 777 widebody plan to help reduce the operating costs of the 14-year-old model and enable it to better compete with the Airbus A350, which is scheduled to enter service in 2013. The company might alternatively build a bigger version of the 787 or opt for a wholly new plane.

In the single-aisle market, Carson said in an interview today that Boeing has told its suppliers to be on standby for a 10 percent variation -- either up or down -- in the build rate for the 737, the world’s best-selling aircraft.

The executive said earlier that there are no plans to cut output of the model and that there may even be an “upside opportunity” to increase the build rate if the economy picks up.

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