

Boeing history of broken tails, gear shimmies may mean no drama-free 787

Bloomberg
SEATTLE

BOEING scheduled the 787 Dreamliner's maiden flight for next week, an event that would cap more than two years of delays and meet an August promise to fly by the end of 2009.

The plastic-composites jet will fly as early as December 15, Boeing said in an e-mail on Thursday. The date depends upon final internal reviews, a taxi test, receiving an approval from the US Federal Aviation Administration, and weather. The world's second-largest commercial-plane maker expects to begin delivering the jet to customers in late 2010. "It's a welcome event, but nobody seriously doubts that the plane could get airborne," said Richard Aboulafia, an analyst with the Teal Group consultancy in Fairfax, Virginia. "The first flight is merely a necessary box to check, as Boeing continues to wrestle with design and production issues. The much bigger



A file photo of Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

questions are if and when Boeing can improve the aircraft to get it to the promised level of performance." The 787 is Boeing's fastest-selling model, with 840 orders valued at about \$150 billion at list prices. Even so, the company's shares have lost almost half their value since the 787's first delivery delay was announced in October 2007. Rival Airbus SAS has gained sales ground in that time with 505 orders for its competing A350 model airplane, which will now enter service three years behind the 250-seat Dreamliner.

The 787 was originally supposed to fly in August 2007 and be delivered to customers in May 2008, starting with Japan's All Nippon Airways.

The plane's most recent setback occurred in June, just days before it had been set to fly, after engineers discovered that some composite layers where the wing joins the body had separated in ground tests. The 787 is the first airliner being built with mostly composite plastics, rather than aluminum, to save on fuel

Airbus troop plane in maiden flight

Europe's new military transport plane, the Airbus A400M, made its first test flight on Friday as buyers resumed talks on how to keep the delayed €20 billion (\$29.5 billion) project airborne. The A400M was commissioned by seven European Nato countries to support combat operations in rugged zones like Afghanistan or to assist in humanitarian relief operations.

consumption. Boeing has blamed disruptions in development on parts shortages, defects, redesigns and problems with suppliers not completing all their work. The company has continued some testing and production work while engineers strengthened sections of the planes'

fuselages. There are now 14 Dreamliners — including six test jets — in various stages of production at the company's wide-body factory in Everett, Washington, just north of Seattle. "It doesn't mean the first delivery will be right on time, but there's no reason to believe it won't just because they've been late before," said Joseph Campbell, an analyst with Barclay's in New York.

The Dreamliner will take off from a strip next to the Everett factory where it was built and fly to Boeing Field in south Seattle, where it will be based during about nine months of testing for certification. "Our policy calls for good visibility, no standing water on the runway and gentle or no winds," said Yvonne Leach, a Boeing spokeswoman.

Boeing fell 46 cents to \$55.01 on Thursday in New York Stock Exchange composite trading. The Chicago-based company's shares have fallen 46% since the 787's first delay, more than the 29% decline in the S&P 500 Aerospace and Defense Index.