Major Assembly Begins on First Boeing 777-300

Boeing yesterday began building the newest and largest member of it's 777 airplane family -- the 777-300. Marking the first step in the assembly process, workers here loaded a 105-foot-long wing spar - an internal support structure - into a giant tool that automatically drills, measures and installs more than 5,000 fasteners into the spar.

"Although there is no one day when the invention of an airplane is complete, the start of major assembly symbolizes the completion of the airplane's invention phase and the beginning of the build process," said Jeff Peace, 777-300 Program manager.

"The program set an aggressive goal to enter the airplane into service 32 months after firm configuration. A dedicated, focused team has worked long and hard to make that a reality. The transition to manufacturing at this time demonstrates that the team will meet this goal," he said.

The 777-300 Program was launched in June 1995 and achieved firm configuration in October 1995.

The 777-300 is a stretched, higher-capacity derivative of the initial 777-200 model. At 242 feet, 4 inches (73.8 meters), the new airplane will be 33 feet longer than the -200. It will carry 20 percent more passengers, for a total of 368 to 550, depending on the configuration.

The stretched derivative will have the same fuel capacity -- 45,220 gallons (171,160 liters) -- as the longer-range 777-200 Increased Gross Weight airplane, and will serve routes up to 5,700 nautical miles (10,500 km). A typical route would be Tokyo to Singapore, Honolulu to Seoul or San Francisco to Tokyo.

The 777-300 matches the 747-100/-200 models in passenger capacity and range capability, but will burn one-third less fuel and have 40 percent lower maintenance costs. For airlines, this means cash operating costs that are one-third below early model 747s.

"We finally get to build the airplane we designed the factory for," said Lyle Eveland, director, 777 Manufacturing Operations. "The entire 777 factory was provisioned from the beginning for an airplane the size of the 777-300." "Working with the engineering product development team, we determined the maximum size the airplane could be, and built the factory to accommodate that airplane. It's exciting to start building the stretched 777, which has been part of our vision from the beginning," Eveland said.

Seven airlines - All Nippon Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways, Korean Air Lines, Thai Airways International, Malaysia Airlines, Japan Airlines and Asiana Airlines - have ordered 50 777-300s. The first is scheduled for delivery to Cathay Pacific Airways of Hong Kong in May 1998. The airline was one of the initial partners in the "working together" effort between Boeing and customer airlines in developing the 777 twinjet.

"The product definition teams have demonstrated the power and value of Boeing working together with its customers," Peace said. "I am confident that this spirit of working together will continue throughout the production phase to factory rollout in August and beyond into airline service."

The Boeing 777 airplane family has captured 69 percent of the market share for airplanes in its class since the program was launched in October 1990. Twenty-five airlines worldwide have ordered 323 777s. To date, Boeing has delivered 56 of the twinjets to 10 airlines.

###