Longest Boeing 737 Makes First Flight

The longest Boeing 737 ever built made its first flight today, with Boeing Capts. Mike Hewett and Jim McRoberts at the airplane's controls.

At 9 a.m. PDT, the 129-foot, 6-inch 737-800 took off from Renton Municipal Airport in Renton, Wash, as Boeing employees cheered. After heading north over Lake Washington, the pilots flew the newest member of the 737 family north to the Straits of Juan de Fuca to conduct a series of flight tests between there and Tatoosh. Three hours and five minutes later, the airplane landed at Boeing Field in Seattle.

"The Next-Generation 737-800 is a great-looking airplane," said Jack Gucker, 737/757 Derivative Programs vice president. "It has been less than six months since our first Next-Generation 737-700 took to the skies. This program is constantly setting new standards."

Commenting on the 737 milestone, Gary Scott, 737/757 Programs vice president and general manager said the Next-Generation 737-800 first flight is a great example of The Boeing Company's commitment to provide a high-value family of airplanes that will meet all customers' needs.

"We don't believe in the theory that one size fits all; we have a Boeing product for every customer mission," Scott added.

During the flight, Hewett and copilot McRoberts conducted a series of tests on the airplane's systems and structures. Using flight-test equipment on board the aircraft, information from the tests was recorded and the pilots transmitted verbal data back to Flight Test personnel working at the control room at Boeing Field. The same team of specialists later will analyze the data.

From 17,000 thousand feet, Hewett said," We've got a flawless flight."

"It's a great airplane and the people that put it together can be very happy they did a good job," said McRoberts.

The first 737-800 is the 2,906th 737 built and the 6,508th commercial airplane built by Boeing in Renton. This newest 737 model is a stretched version of the current 737-400 and is capable of carrying 160 to 189 passengers. Changes from current production 737s include a new and larger wing, higher cruise speed, more range, and new engines with improvements in noise, fuel burn and thrust. These improvements allow the Next-Generation 737-600/-700/-800 family members to fly higher, faster and farther than current 737s. The 737 -- a short- to medium-range airplane delivers value to airlines in the form of reliability, simplicity, and reduced operating and maintenance costs. In addition, the new 737-600/-700/-800 models offer crew commonality with today's 737.

The 737-800 was launched on Sept. 5, 1994, at the Farnborough Air Show with commitments from customers to purchase more than 40 of the airplanes. Certification of the 737-800 is scheduled for February 1998 and first delivery, to German carrier Hapag-Lloyd, in March. The price tag for the 737-800 is between $48 and $54 million.

The Next-Generation flight-test program consists of 10 airplanes, including four 737-700s, three 737-800s and three 737-600s. Each models flight-test program is planned to last approximately seven months and will consist of more than 2,300 in-flight test hours. The 737-700, which made its first flight Feb. 9, 1997, offers 128 to 149 seats and is equivalent in size to the current 737-300, but with greater range.

The 737-600, equivalent in size to the current 737-500, provides seating for 108 to 132 passengers. Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS), launched the 737-600 in March 1995 with an order for 35 airplanes and added six more in October of that year. Deliveries to SAS will begin in mid-1998. The first 737-600 fuselage is scheduled to be completed at the Boeing Wichita manufacturing plant later this summer. Rollout is planned for December 1997, first flight in January 1998 and certification in July 1998.

The 737-600/-700/-800 models are powered by new CFM56-7 engines produced by CFMI, a joint venture of General Electric of the United States and Snecma of France. The CFM56-7 will have a 10-percent higher thrust capability than the CFM56-3C engines that power today's 737s.

In addition to commercial airplanes, Boeing also offers a business jet derived from the 737-700. With auxiliary fuel tanks, the business jet can fly more than 6,000 nautical miles. The business jet is sold and marketed through Boeing Business Jets, a joint venture formed this summer between The Boeing Company and the General Electric Co.

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