Boeing 777-300 Completes First Flight

The Boeing 777-300 took to the skies for the first time at 10:27 a.m. PDT today, embarking on a seven-month flight-test program that is scheduled to end next May with U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certification.

The 4-hour, 6-minute flight was the first of more than 1,400 flight-test hours planned for the latest addition to the Boeing family of commercial jetliners. This first flight comes almost 28 months to the day after the June 26, 1995 launch of the 777-300 program.

"The takeoff felt normal, nothing unusual," Chief Pilot Frank Santoni radioed moments after the airplane lifted off from Paine Field in Everett.

After putting the airplane through various maneuvers, Santoni said the 777-300 is "accomplishing all scheduled test conditions and is performing great."

During its maiden flight, the 777-300 took off into clear, sunny skies and reached a maximum altitude of 17,000 feet (5,100 meters). Decked out in a Boeing paint scheme of red, white and blue stripes on a polished aluminum fuselage, the airplane headed north above Puget Sound, passing over the San Juan Islands. Turning west, the world's longest commercial jetliner soared above the Strait of Juan de Fuca and out to the Pacific Ocean, west of the snow-crowned Olympic Mountains. It returned through the strait and a landing at Boeing Field in Seattle.

"I'm proud to be part of this," said John Cashman, director of Flight Crew Operations and chief pilot for Boeing Commercial Airplane Group. "It just keeps getting better and better." Cashman was the lead pilot on the maiden flight of the 777-200 in June 1994.

"The 777 program is a big part of the company's future," said Ron Ostrowski, vice president and general manager of the 777 Program, who was on hand to greet the crew when the airplane landed. "It's an exciting day for all of us. It's great to see another successful product of working together with our customers and suppliers."

The airplane, powered by two Rolls-Royce Trent 892 engines, represents the continuing "working together" approach the Seattle manufacturer has used to develop the 777 family, with participation by airline customers, suppliers and engine companies.

Five other 777-300s will be included in the flight-test program, including two powered by Pratt & Whitney PW4090 engines and one powered by Pratt & Whitney PW4098 engines.

During flight test, the 777-300s will be operated in extremely hot and cold climates to prove the safety and reliability of the airplane's systems. Flight times will vary from less than an hour to extended-range missions lasting nine hours.

This comprehensive testing is part of an effort to ensure at delivery the 777-300's reliability and service-ready condition to fly all intended missions, including over-water routes.

Successful completion of the testing program is expected to lead to FAA certification of Rolls-Royce-powered 777-300s in May, with delivery of the first customer airplane to Cathay Pacific Airways scheduled for that same month. Certification of the 777-300s powered by the Pratt & Whitney PW4090 and PW4098 engines is expected in June and September 1998, respectively.

The 777-300 is a widebody, medium-to-long-range twinjet, capable of carrying between 328 and 550 passengers and flying 6,450 statute miles (10,370 kilometers). The airplane rolled out of the Boeing factory Sept. 8, 1997. To date, eight customers have placed orders for 52 777-300s. Total 777 announced orders stand at 335.

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