Boeing 717-200 Takes First Flight in Sunny California Skies

The 717-200, Boeing Commercial Airplane Group's newest 100-seat jetliner, flew for the first time today. A cheering crowd of employees, suppliers and customers -- along with Internet viewers around the world -- watched as the short-range twinjet took to the skies.

Painted in Boeing red, white and blue colors, the 717-200 took off at 12:35 p.m. from the Long Beach Municipal Airport, located near the company's Long Beach Division.

At the controls were Capts. Ralph Luczak and Tom Melody, who flew the airplane west toward Santa Catalina Island, located off the California coast. Also on board was Will Gibbons, the 717-200 flight-test conductor. After the airplane flew over Catalina, it headed southeast toward Arizona before landing at the Boeing flight test center in Yuma, Ariz.

During the four hour, seven minute flight Luczak, Melody and Gibbons performed a series of tests on the airplane's engines, control surfaces and systems. The crew transmitted both verbal and recorded data back in real-time to flight test personnel in the Flight Operations and Test Center at the Long Beach Division.

The 717-200 is designed to replace the thousands of airplanes now in service in the 100-seat market and to meet the needs of fleet expansion during the next 20 years.

Wednesday's flight officially marked the beginning of the 717-200's flight-test and type certification program. Four airplanes will be used in the program; three of the airplanes will carry flight instruments and the fourth, a customer production model, will have a complete AirTran interior. The customer production model will be used to evaluate the function and reliability of equipment that is used during revenue flight, such as galleys and the air conditioning system. Testing will be based at the company's Yuma facility over the next nine months, followed by concurrent certification by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration and Europe's Joint Airworthiness Authority in the third quarter of 1999.

The 717 was originally launched in October 1995 as the MD-95, with an order for 50 airplanes and 50 options from AirTran Airways located in Orlando, Fla. AirTran is scheduled to receive its first 717 after the airplane is certified. The first European customer for the airplane is Bavaria International Aircraft Company, based in Munich, Germany.

Currently, five other 717-200s are in various stages of final assembly. The first airplane rolled out of the factory on June 10, 1998.

Based on the famed DC-9 durable airframe, the 717 features new engines, new flight deck and other modern systems, new interior and enhanced performance. A global team of 16 major supplier-partners in the United States and eight nations in Asia and Europe are working as members of the Boeing team in building the 717.

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