Boeing 747 Celebrates 30 Years' Proven Success, Strong Future

The Boeing Company today celebrated the 30-year anniversary of the first Boeing 747 to roll out of the factory. Known as the world's first jumbo jet, the 747 is still the world's largest commercial jetliner. With nearly 1,200 delivered, the 747 is the best-selling twin-aisle jet in the industry.

The 747's longevity and popularity are based on its unbeatable low seat-mile costs, flexibility, long-range dominance, unmatched comfort options and an ability to integrate new technology. Not only is this demonstrated in the 15 different 747 models built over the years, it is a legacy that will continue well into the next century.

"There's practically nothing this airplane can't do. It can haul more passengers and more freight faster and farther than any other commercial airplane," said Ed Renouard, vice president and general manager - 747/767 Programs. "It is flown by the president of the United States and dignitaries from around the world, as well as working folks and business travelers.

"Our armed forces use it for military operations and our nation's space program uses it to ferry the space shuttle," Renouard added. "It's an intercontinental long-range airplane as well as an ultra-high capacity, short-range airplane in Japan.

"On top of that, in the last 30 years, the 747 fleet has flown 2.2 billion people, the equivalent of nearly 40 percent of the world's population."

Boeing launched the 747 Program in 1966 with an order from Pan American World Airways. The 747 entered commercial service with Pan Am in 1970. With nearly 1,100 airplanes in service today and its distinctive trademark "hump," the 747 is the most recognizable commercial airplane in the world. During its lifetime, the 747 worldwide fleet has logged more than 50 million flight hours, 12 million flights and 20 billion miles (32 billion km) - enough to make 42,000 trips to the moon and back.

The 747 is capable of carrying up to 568 passengers, depending on the model and its interior configuration. The 747-400, currently the only model in production, entered commercial service in 1989 and has sold more than any other 747 version. Boeing thoroughly redesigned the 747-400, making major aerodynamic improvements, adding winglets to reduce drag, incorporating new avionics, installing a new flight deck and providing the latest in-flight entertainment systems.

The 747-400 has a range of approximately 8,400 statute miles (13,515 km) and can comfortably seat 416 passengers in a typical three-class configuration. It has the lowest cost per seat-mile of any twin-aisle jet offered by any manufacturer and a dispatch-reliability rate of 98.8 percent. The 747-400 is available as a passenger airplane, a freighter or a passenger-freighter combination.

Engines for the early-model 747s initially were available with 43,000 pounds of thrust. Today, Pratt & Whitney, General Electric and Rolls-Royce offer engines for the 747-400 with up to 62,000 pounds of thrust.

"From the beginning, the 747 was designed with versatility in mind," said Joe Sutter, chief engineer of the original 747 Program and now a retired Boeing executive vice president.

"Because of this, it has adapted easily to new technology and changing customer requirements. This flexibility is what makes the airplane so popular with the airlines and the flying public - it's what makes the 747 legendary," Sutter said.

Boeing is discussing with key 747 customers an increased-gross-weight 747-400X that has a maximum takeoff weight of 910,000 pounds (409,500 kg). This is 35,000 pounds (15,876 kg) more takeoff weight, resulting in 460 statute miles (740 km) more range than the current 747-400.

Boeing also is studying two other 747 possibilities. One would offer even more range than the 910,000-pound 747-400X, while the other would be a stretch version, capable of carrying 20 percent more passengers than the 747-400.

"We're continuing to work closely with our customers to define a family of 747s that will meet their needs, including more payload capability, more range or a combination of both," Renouard said.

"Because of the 747's evolutionary capability and its proven success, there's no doubt this airplane has a very strong future, or that we'll be building some version of it for at least another 30 years," he said.

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