Major Assembly Begins on First Boeing 767-400RT

The Boeing Company has begun building its newest twin-aisle airplane in its Everett, Wash., factory. Workers recently loaded the 767-400ER (extended range) front left-wing spar into an automated tool to start assembling the airplane wing. A celebration will take place this morning in the factory to commemorate reaching this milestone.

Assembly of the airplane begins with the spar, which runs the full length of the wing and supports the wing structure internally. Suppliers around the world began fabricating many parts and subassemblies less than a year ago.

"We've never been better prepared to start building a new derivative airplane," said John Quinlivan, Boeing Commercial Airplanes Group program manager - 767-400ER. "In addition to the traditional design reviews, we've also held formal reviews for tooling and production readiness." The advantage of these reviews, according to Quinlivan, is getting everyone involved at an early stage to manage changes to the airplane and how it is built.

At 201 feet, 4 inches, the 767-400ER is the second 767 derivative to be "stretched." The first was the 180-foot 767-300, which is 21 feet longer than the original 767-200. The newest 767 will carry about 15 percent more passengers than the -300 version, accommodating 245 seats in a three-class configuration and 304 in a two-class layout. This compares with 218 and 269 seats in the 767-300, respectively.

"The factory has been involved since the airplane was in its preliminary design phase," said Ray Simon, operations manager - 767-400ER. "And as soon as the engineers hit the 'save' button on the airplane design, we started getting ready to build this airplane."

According to Simon, tooling changes were minimized and are proceeding on schedule. Boeing recently completed one entirely new tool, which will be used during the second stage of building up the airplane spars and will accommodate all 767 versions. Numerically controlled drilling tools will precisely locate holes based on three-dimensional data and then drill the holes.

"It saves time and eliminates tedious, tough work," said Simon. "The added benefit of this new tool is the drilling tools are portable. They have the potential to be used, with some modifications, on other production lines like the 747."

The first 767-400ER is scheduled to roll out of the factory this summer, begin a flight-test program in October and deliver to Delta Air Lines in May 2000.

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