Boeing 747 Celebrates 30-Year Anniversary of Paris Debut

The "Queen of the Skies" revolutionizes travel - then, now and in the future

Thirty years ago, the Boeing 747-100 made its historic debut at the Paris Air Show, giving the aviation world a glimpse of the future of international air travel. Today, its successor - the modern-technology, state-of-the-art 747-400 - makes history every day as the most recognized and prestigious airplane in the world, the flagship of any fleet. Its combination of size and range is unmatched, giving it the lowest cost per seat of any airplane - making it a favorite of airlines and passengers.

"The 747 invented long-range comfort, and we're continuously evolving the airplane to serve markets of the future," said Randy Baseler, Boeing Commercial Airplanes Group vice president - Marketing. "While today's 747 might look like the first 747 that arrived in Paris 30 years ago, the resemblance ends there. It is an entirely different airplane, with improved aerodynamics, digital avionics, a new flight deck, the latest in-flight entertainment systems and 3,000 miles more range - a 57 percent increase."

Of the 1,100 747s in the world fleet today, more than 40 percent are 747-400s, which this year celebrates 10 years of service. Compared to the original 747, the 747-400 has significantly increased its range, passenger capacity, takeoff weight, engine thrust and dispatch reliability. And the 747 remains the world's fastest subsonic commercial jetliner, allowing passengers on long flights to arrive at their destinations nearly an hour sooner than passengers flying on competitor's airplanes, Baseler said.

Not only has the airplane been continually modernized, so have the techniques used to build it. Over the past four years, Boeing has digitized original engineering drawings for the huge fuselage and installed new tooling to improve manufacturing quality and reduce production costs. In 1999, Boeing will support the fast-growing cargo business by delivering 10 747-400 Freighters, the most ever in a single year. The 747-400 Freighter can carry twice as much cargo, twice as far, as its nearest competitor.

The 747 clearly is an airplane with an impressive pedigree. With every flight, it makes history. But what about the future? "There is a limited market for airplanes in the 747-and-larger category," Baseler said. "That's why the future in this market is to continue improving the 747's range, payload and passenger capacity. When the market will support an airplane bigger than the 747-400, Boeing will be ready to respond."

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