Wheels Up! Boeing 767-400ER Makes Debut Flight

The new 767-400ER (extended range) rose into the sky above Paine Field in Everett, Wash., today for the first time, and is heading west down the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Commanding the airplane are Capt. Buzz Nelson, 767 Program chief pilot, and first officer Capt. John Cashman, Flight Crew Operations director.

Before takeoff, a Boeing ground crew wheeled the air stairs away from the airplane and signaled the pilots, who nosed the airplane out of its stall. The airplane, identified as VQ001, taxied then lifted off the runway at 12:10 p.m.

A crowd of Boeing employees stood along the runway and cheered.

"This is as good as it gets," said Pat Shanahan, 767-400ER program manager, who was on hand to witness the event in Everett. "So many employees, as well as our supplier- and airline-team members, have worked hard to deliver on a commitment we made more than two years ago to develop, build and certify the airplane. It's an incredible feeling when you see it fly."

During the flight, which is expected to last about five hours, Nelson and Cashman will conduct a series of tests on the airplane systems and structures. Flight-test equipment on board is recording and transmitting data to flight-test employees stationed in a control room at Boeing Field in Seattle. These data, as well as verbal information provided by the pilots during flight, will be analyzed later by the team.

"All of our ability to integrate and work together comes home when we accomplish something as significant as a first flight," Shanahan said. "The flight-test program is key to delivering a reliable airplane that performs as expected from day one."

This debut flight signals the official beginning of a six-and-a-half-month flight-test program for the 767-400ER, during which this airplane, and two other 767-400ERs now in the final stages of completion, will accumulate approximately 800 flight hours and 1,100 ground-test hours. At the conclusion of flight test, the 767-400ER will achieve certification by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration and concurrence by the European Joint Aviation Authorities.

The 201-foot-long 767-400ER carries as much as 15 percent more passengers than the 767-300ER, seating 245 passengers in a three-class configuration and 304 passengers in a two-class configuration. Its newly designed features include an upgraded flight deck with a 777-style display arrangement, aerodynamic wingtip extensions, landing gear, higher capacity electrical power system supporting full-cabin inflight entertainment and sleek interiors based on the 777 cabin.

The airplane, designed to be the most efficient airplane in its size category, will be able to serve all U.S. domestic routes. It also can serve North Atlantic routes such as Los Angeles-London or international routes including New York-Santiago, Chile; Seattle-Osaka; and Atlanta-Honolulu.

The 767-400ER Program was formally launched in April 1997 with an order for 21 airplanes from Delta Air Lines; orders now total 54. The airplane rolled out of the Everett, Wash., factory hangar in August 1999 and first delivery is scheduled for May 2000 to Delta Air Lines.

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