FAA And JAA Certify Boeing 717-200 Upgraded Flight Computer

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Europe's Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) have certified the Boeing 717-200's first major upgrade to the airplane's flight control computer and flight management system.

Both regulatory agencies certified the changes on Oct. 20, 2000, after a rigorous 12-month follow-on program at the Boeing Long Beach Division. Initial certification of the short-range twinjet occurred in September 1999.

"The 717 has gained an outstanding reputation for offering one of the most advanced flight decks in the Boeing fleet," said Terry Beezhold, director of the 717 Forward Cabin Integration Team. "The upgrade we have certified will help make the aircraft even better, including boosting its dispatch reliability, which has recently exceeded the program goal."

All functions originally envisioned for the airplane's Flight Management and Autoflight systems now have been certified.

The updated Flight Management System (FMS) now includes Global Positioning System capability, fuel predictions, and vertical guidance. These features provide optimal fuel burn and automatic control to a vertical path. The vertical path is constructed using airplane performance data stored in the onboard computers. The FMS also calculates take-off Vspeeds - the airspeed at which airplanes rotate or lift off the ground - eliminating the need for the flight crew to review charts and manually enter the information.

A data link function has been added to enable digital flight planning communications between the airplane and ground air traffic control and airline operational control.

Autoflight System updates include a reactive windshear function to help flight crews detect and escape this potentially hazardous condition. A Category IIIb autoland capability, allowing an airplane to land when visibility is extremely limited, is also available.

Chuck Finazzo, project leader of the follow-on certification, said the upgrade package also contains other improvements and customer requested changes based on customer inputs received during the first six months of revenue service.

AirTran Airways, the launch customer, began 717-passenger service in October 1999. Other current operators include Aerolineas Baleares, Impulse Airlines, Olympic Aviation, and Trans World Airlines.

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