Boeing 777-300ER, Newest 777 Airplane, Completes First Flight

The Boeing 777-300ER today completed its maiden flight, beginning a 1,600-hour flight-test program that's expected to bring U.S. government certification by early next year.

The newest member of the 777 airplane family, with its distinctive red, white and blue paint scheme, took off at 10 a.m. Pacific from Paine Field in Everett, Wash. After flying a little over three hours, it landed at 1:02 p.m. at Seattle's Boeing Field.

Veteran Boeing [NYSE: BA] pilots Capts. Frank Santoni and John Cashman were at the controls. Santoni is the chief 777 test pilot and Cashman is director of Flight Crew Operations and chief pilot for Boeing Commercial Airplanes.

"The Boeing 777 is an incredible flying machine," Santoni said. "It's no wonder pilots call it the 'World's Greatest Airplane'. Being at the controls of an airplane on its first flight is a rare and unique opportunity, and it always is exciting."

The 777-300ER is the fourth 777 model. Cashman and Santoni also took the 777-200ER and 777-300 on their maiden flights, and Cashman was at the controls when the first 777, the 777-200, first flew on June 12, 1994.

During today's flight Santoni and Cashman took the 777-300ER to an altitude of 15,000 feet (4,572 meters) and an air speed of 0.50 Mach, or about 370 miles (600 kilometers) per hour. Typically, the 777's cruise altitude is 35,000 feet (10,668 meters), and its cruise speed is Mach 0.84, about 557 miles (896 kilometers) per hour.

Santoni and Cashman tested some of the airplane's systems and structures, as on-board equipment recorded and transmitted data to a flight-test team at Boeing Field. That data, and the crew's comments, will be analyzed in the near future.

The flight-test program will involve the airplane flown today and a second one that is in the final stages of assembly. Those will be subjected to a variety of conditions to prove the safety and reliability of the airplane's systems. Flight times will vary, including one extended-range flight lasting up to 19 hours. More than 1,000 hours of ground tests also are planned.

The comprehensive testing will validate the 777-300ER's reliability and service-ready condition for all intended missions.

"I'm so proud of this team and what they've accomplished," said Lars Andersen, Boeing 777 Longer Range program manager. "Boeing employees, airlines and a global network of suppliers worked together to design and manufacture the 777-300ER. We're now ready to enter into the flight-test stage of the program with a mature and proven design."

Airframe certification by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration is expected during the fourth quarter of this year. Certification of the interior is expected during the first quarter 2004. International Lease Finance Corp., and its customer Air France, will receive the first 777-300ER in April 2004.

Touted as the world's most technologically advanced airplane the 777-300ER will have updated avionic, electrical, flight and environmental control systems.

GE Aircraft Engines [NYSE: GE] manufactures the engines for the 777-200LR and 777-300ER airplanes. The new engines have been recognized as the world's most powerful commercial jet engines and currently hold a Guinness World Record for thrust.

"This is a truly outstanding achievement for all of those who have worked so closely together on the new 777," said Chaker Chahrour, general manager of the GE90 engine program at GE Aircraft Engines. "The first flight of the 777 with GE90-115B engines signals a new beginning in aviation. With the addition of the 777-300ER and the 777-200LR airplanes, customers will be able to reach more non-stop global destinations providing more efficient travel to their passengers."

There are two Longer-Range 777 models. The 777-300ER carries 365 passengers up to 7,420 nautical miles (13,742 kilometers) while the 777-200LR can carry 301 passengers up to 9,170 nautical miles (16,983 kilometers).

Both the 777-300ER and the 777-200LR were launched in February 2002 by Boeing and GE Aircraft Engines at the request of customers who asked for an airplane with additional flexibility to serve the non-stop routes that passengers demand.

The 777 family has captured nearly 70 percent of the market since the airplane's October 1990 launch. Thirty-nine customers and operators worldwide have ordered 619 777s, including 61 Longer-Range 777s ordered by seven customers: Air France, All Nippon Airways, EVA Airways, GE Capital Aviation Services, ILFC, Japan Airlines and Pakistan International Airlines.

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