Boeing Leadership in Aviation Spans Near-Entirety of First 100 Years of Powered Flight

Company Founders' Vision Sparked by Wright Brothers' Early Successes

In just a few months the world will celebrate the 100th anniversary of powered flight, thanks to the legendary Wright Brothers, and The Boeing Company is proud of its role as an aviation industry leader throughout most of that fascinating journey.

Prominent Seattle timberman, landowner and yachtsman William E. "Bill" Boeing -- founder of the The Boeing Company -- in the early 1930s. Boeing started the company after reportedly saying, "I think I can build a better airplane," following his first flight in 1915.
In fact, the two men whose companies would merge in 1997 -- William Boeing and Donald Douglas -- were both inspired by the duo but in different ways. Donald Douglas watched Orville Wright fly in 1908 and later built one of aviation's greatest companies. When William Boeing witnessed an air show in 1910 inspired by the brothers' feats, aviation became an instant obsession. The show was a catalyst that would lead him to build his own plane and start his own airplane company, Pacific Aero Products, in 1916.

Since then, the fledgling organization's successor -- the modern-day Boeing Company -- has led the aviation industry with a century of innovation and excellence.

"From the Model 247 and B-17 in the 1930s to the 777 and C-17 today, Boeing has been the world leader in building big planes for both military and commercial use," said Michael Lombardi of Boeing Historical Archives. "Since its incorporation, Boeing has had a reputation for being a leader in introducing not just evolutionary, but revolutionary, technology to the fields of aviation and space flight."

In the first half of the century Boeing distinguished itself with many firsts, including the company's first multiple-production commercial airplane, the Model 40; the world's first modern airliner, the Model 247; the world's first passenger aircraft with a pressurized cabin, the 307 Stratoliner; and the luxurious Flying Boat, the 314 Clipper. Military innovations in those first decades included the giant B-17 Flying Fortress and the most technologically advanced aircraft of World War II, the B-29 Superfortress.

Perhaps the most significant development prior to the mid-century mark was the discovery that Boeing engineers made in the company's Seattle Wind Tunnel: the concept of swept wings with jet engines suspended in pods under the wings. This design remains the standard pattern for large transport jets today, and spawned the world's first large swept-wing jet, the B-47 Stratojet.

The Dash 80 shows a fresh paint job in May 1972, just before Boeing donated it to the Smithsonian Institution and the plane went into storage in the Arizona desert.
The next half-century at Boeing began with the giant B-52 Stratofortress and the dawn of the Jet Age. Boeing President William Allen undertook development of a jet transport prototype, given model number 367-80 and later known affectionately as the "Dash 80." The Dash 80 first flew on July 15, 1954, and the company sold the airplane's first offspring -- the KC-135 Stratotanker -- to the U.S. Air Force. Some airlines soon bought the Dash 80's second offspring: the world's first successful commercial jet, the venerable 707.

In the 1960s Boeing developed jet transports to satisfy the airlines' range and passenger needs, introducing the 727 trijet in 1963 and the smaller 737 twinjet in 1967. Boeing also aimed for the Moon with overall integration, testing and evaluation of the Apollo-Saturn vehicle; the first stage of the Saturn booster, the world's largest and most powerful rocket booster; and the Lunar Rover, the "Moon Buggy" that transported

the Apollo 15, 16, and 17 astronauts around the Lunar surface.

Boeing-built Lunar Roving Vehicles carried astronauts on three separate missions -- Apollo 15, 16 and 17 -- to explore the surface of the moon.
Boeing completed the decade with fanfare when in 1968 it built the world's largest passenger plane, the 747 Jumbo Jet, and when in 1969 the Boeing-built first-stage rocket boosted the Apollo 11 crew into space, enabling Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin to became the first human beings to walk on the Moon.

The rest of the 20th century saw Boeing take the lead in providing economical, high-technology, fuel-efficient airplanes with the 757 and 767; refining the 747 and 737 families; and introducing the world's largest twinjet and most technologically advanced airplane in the world, the 777. The company also won a 10-year contract to design the living and working quarters of the International Space Station, an orbiting space station where eight astronauts will conduct research activities.

As the 100th year of flight dawned in January 2003, Boeing gave the world yet another new glimpse of the future. Passengers aboard Lufthansa Flight 418 en route from Frankfurt, Germany, to Washington, D.C., plugged in their laptops at their seats and experienced the Internet just as they do at the office or home, experiencing the newest frontier in connectivity. The revolutionary system these aviation pioneers used was developed by Connexion by Boeing^{SM}, a relatively new Boeing business unit.

"The passenger feedback we've received has been overwhelmingly positive, as we work with global airlines on teaching the Internet to fly," said Connexion by Boeing President Scott Carson.

Looking forward to the next century of flight, Boeing is responding to the overwhelming preference of airlines around the world by focusing its new airplane product development efforts on the Boeing 7E7, a super-efficient airplane.

The 7E7 will carry 200-250 passengers on routes between 7,200 and 8,000 nautical miles while using 15 to 20 percent less fuel for comparable flights than any other wide body airplane. Passengers will enjoy several improvements, from an interior environment with higher humidity to increased comfort and convenience. Authority to offer the airplane is expected in late 2003 or early 2004, with delivery and entry into service planned for 2008.

According to Mike Bair, senior vice president of the 7E7 program, "In addition to unmatched fuel efficiency and lower operating costs for the airlines, another improvement in efficiency will come in the way the airplane is designed and built. We will apply new technologies and processes with our partners to achieve unprecedented levels of performance at every phase of the program."

Boeing will carry its industry-leading legacy into the next 100 years as it develops and delivers increasingly innovative products and services. The skies are full of airplanes, spacecraft and satellites no one dreamed of 100 years ago, but the vision and values that William Boeing set forth nearly nine decades ago will continue to guide his company well into the next century: "?to keep everlastingly at research and experiment?to let no new improvement in flying and flying equipment pass us by."

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For further information:
Leslie Nichols
206-766-1383