Historic Boeing Airplane Begins Journey to Smithsonian

The Boeing [NYSE: BA] 307 Stratoliner, the first pressurized luxury commercial transport, today took off from Boeing Field in Seattle for its permanent home at the Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

The cross-country trip will take approximately 10 days, including stops in Great Falls, Mont., St. Cloud, Minn., and Oshkosh, Wis. The airplane will be on display in Oshkosh at the Experimental Aviation Association AirVenture Airshow from July 29 through Aug. 4. Upon arrival in Washington, D.C., it will be enshrined in the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, a companion facility to the National Air and Space Museum located at Dulles International Airport.

The Stratoliner was the world's first fully pressurized four-engine airliner put into scheduled domestic service in 1940. Pressurization enabled it to cruise at 14,000 feet or higher, an altitude described at the time as "above the weather."

Boeing built 10 Stratoliners before ceasing production to focus on military airplanes during World War II. Air carriers such as Pan American Airways and Trans World Airlines used the airplanes on routes to Latin America and from New York to Los Angeles. This last existing Stratoliner was dubbed the Clipper Flying Cloud by Pan American Airways upon delivery in March 1940.

The Smithsonian acquired the Clipper Flying Cloud in 1972 from its previous owner. Later, the Smithsonian and Boeing entered into an agreement to restore the plane to its original condition.

The restoration began in June 1994 by a team of volunteers and Boeing employees, who fabricated parts, reinstalled interiors and completely restored the airplane to like-new condition. Nearly seven years later the restoration was complete, and the airplane rolled out in 2001 to begin testing and certification. The effort experienced a setback in June 2002 when the pilots had to ditch the airplane into Elliott Bay in Seattle during a test flight.

The volunteers and employees went back to work to repair what they had restored. This second effort took a year to complete.

"This restoration project is unrivaled by any other historical effort we've undertaken," said Ken Higgins, vice president of Flight Operations and Validation at Boeing Commercial Airplanes. "There will never be anything again like the Clipper Flying Cloud. We're very proud to have been given this opportunity to restore such a treasured artifact and return it to the prestigious home where millions of people can admire this part of our aviation history."

The Stratoliner is the first of two historic Boeing airplanes that will be delivered to the National Air & Space Museum this year. The second, the prototype for the Boeing 707, model 367-80 (Dash 80), will leave Seattle for the Smithsonian later this year.

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