Boeing Airplane That Changed Aviation Reaches 50th Anniversary Milestone

Fifty years ago, Boeing [NYSE:BA] unveiled the airplane that spawned the modern era of jet-powered commercial aviation.

On this date in 1954, thousands of people at Boeing's Renton assembly plant watched the rollout of the Boeing 367-80, commonly known as the Dash 80. The airplane flew two months later, starting a transformation that made commercial aviation the essential global industry it is today.

"A half century ago we showed the world the future of flight," said Boeing Commercial Airplanes Chief Executive Officer Alan Mulally. "The passion for innovation that led us to the Dash 80 is defining the future again with our all-new 7E7."

The Dash 80 helped demonstrate the range and speed advantages jets offer over propeller-driven engines. The success of Boeing's 7-series jets -- the 707, 717, 727, 737, 747, 757, 767, 777, and soon the 7E7 -- validates the Dash 80.

To date, Boeing has delivered nearly 15,000 jetliners. More than 12,000 remain in the world's jet inventory.

Boeing developed the Dash 80 with its own investment of $16 million, equivalent to $110 million in today's dollars. The airplane was the prototype for the Boeing 707, the first successful commercial jet, and the U.S. Air Force's KC-135 aerial-refueling airplane.

Boeing delivered more than 1,000 707s between 1958 and 1994, and more than 800 KC-135s between 1957 and 1965. More than 500 U.S. Air Force KC-135s remain in service.

The Dash 80 is displayed at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Va., near Washington-Dulles International Airport. It stands near the historic Boeing 307 Stratoliner, the first pressurized commercial airplane. Boeing employees and retirees restored both airplanes for the museum.

The Boeing Photo Store is marking the anniversary by offering a special selection of Dash 80 prints for purchase. Those can be viewed at the Boeing Photo Store website.

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