Boeing Outlines Progress on New 7E7 Dreamliner Passenger Plane

During a presentation at the Farnborough Air Show, Mike Bair, senior vice president for the Boeing [NYSE:BA] 7E7 program, outlined extensive progress on the airplane's configuration, performance, and technologies, including the use of composite materials.

"We are on track with meeting our program commitments, and the airlines know this airplane is designed to meet the needs of our customers and their customers for many, many years to come," Bair said.

Market and Composites

The strongest validation of the 7E7 is the exceptional response from the world's airlines. Along with the 62 announced orders from four carriers -- including a record launch order from ANA -- Boeing has deposits from about two dozen airlines for nearly 200 airplanes.

"Essentially, the first two years of production are 100 percent committed, and delivery slots for the third year are 80 percent committed," Bair said.

The 7E7 will be made primarily of the same composite materials that Boeing uses on the tail of its 777 airplane. Boeing has extensive composite experience, and is the world's largest producer of graphite composite structure.

"We continue to find that this material has superior performance in terms of its strength, durability and reliability," Bair said.

Boeing's efforts have focused on developing the tools and methods that will make it economical to build much of the airplane with the material, rather than the material itself.

"We're testing several new manufacturing tools as we build full-scale sections of the airplane," Bair said. "We're seeing the improvements we needed in manufacturing and are confident of the material decisions we've made."

Configuration

The 7E7's shape and configuration are to be final by mid-2005.

"The shape of the nose has been pretty much locked in," he said. "It is very similar to the shape in our concept image."

He noted that the wings also will be very similar to the concept image, although the tail is still being worked through the configuration process and will likely change to achieve aerodynamic efficiency.

"Efficiency is our top priority," Bair said. "We're moving toward the concept design but only when we can also achieve our performance targets. The final design won't exactly match the concept image, but it will be very close. We'll know it is a 7E7."

Performance Progress

Bair said that the program is progressing toward achieving its performance targets.

"We will bring new capabilities to the mid-sized market," Bair said. "Airlines and passengers will find that the 7E7 meets their needs because it will allow more direct flights, achieve significant improvements in fuel usage, and be quieter than other airplanes of similar size."

He added that improvements in the airplane cabin have been enthusiastically received.

"From the bigger windows to the wider seats and aisles, we're designing a flight experience passengers will enjoy," Bair said. He also pointed out that improvements in cabin altitude and humidity will help 7E7 passengers feel better at the end of their flights.

Technology

Boeing and its partners are working three 7E7 technologies in addition to the composite materials: engines, aerodynamics, and systems. Progress on each is on track for anticipated first deliveries in 2008.

Engine makers General Electric and Roll-Royce both have developed excellent offerings, according to Bair. On the aerodynamics front, Bair said that testing has verified the accuracy of the computational fluid dynamics tools used by Boeing.

Bair added that he's convinced the 7E7's advanced electric systems are on track.

"We have seen outstanding progress," he said. "Prototype testing has proven the architecture and design will perform as expected, giving us improved performance, better reliability and easier upgrades."

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