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The Boeing [NYSE:BA] Next-Generation 737 airplane is making history again as the application of lean manufacturing techniques gives it the shortest final-assembly time of any large commercial jet.

The 737, the world's most popular commercial airplane model, is now assembled in 11 days at the company's Renton, Wash., facility. That's a 50 percent reduction since lean techniques were introduced there in late 1999.

"Speed is just one aspect of this remarkable achievement," said Carolyn Corvi, 737/757 Programs vice president and general manager. "With market conditions for airlines constantly changing, shorter assembly times allow them to make decisions about interior configuration and systems closer to delivery. That's a great benefit to them."

"We're not going to stop at a 50 percent reduction, but improving our production system isn't just about doing things fast. It's about doing everything better, continuously enhancing the quality of our products and the processes we use to design and build them," Corvi added.

In addition to reducing assembly time, the 737 program has reduced work-in-process inventory by 55 percent and stored inventory by 59 percent.

The program's moving assembly line is the most compelling symbol of the factory's lean improvements. That line moves products from one assembly team to the next at the steady pace of two inches per minute. Other lean techniques Boeing uses include just-in-time delivery systems, point-of-use staging of tool and parts kits, standardized work processes, and visual control systems.

The lean techniques, which Boeing is applying to other production lines, enable a smooth, continuous production flow, enhancing the quality and efficiency of production processes.

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