Boeing 747 Large Cargo Freighter Completes First Flight

The Boeing [NYSE: BA] 747-400 Large Cargo Freighter took to the skies for the first time at 10:38 a.m. (UTC/GMT +8 hours) today, initiating the flight test program that will culminate in U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certification.

The two-hour, four-minute flight was the first of 250 expected flight test hours for the unique freighter, a specially modified 747-400 that will transport major composite structures of the all-new 787 Dreamliner.

The enormous jet -- with its enlarged upper fuselage that can accommodate three times the cargo by volume of a standard 747-400 freighter -- gracefully took off under rainy skies from Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport (formerly Chiang Kai-Shek International Airport). Boeing flight test pilots, Capts. Joe MacDonald and Randy Wyatt, took the airplane north, and then flew roughly 150 miles south following along the east side of the island before heading north again.

"It went beautifully," MacDonald said after the flight ended. In fact, the airplane handled so well, "quite often during the flight, it was easy to forget you were in an LCF rather than a regular 747-400," he said.

Evergreen Aviation Technologies Corp., part of Taiwan's Evergreen Group, is modifying the fleet of three airplanes at its facility at the airport.

"This is a key moment in the Dreamliner program," said Scott Strode, 787 vice president of Airplane Development and Production. "The LCF fleet is the foundation of our lean, global production system and enables us to meet the unprecedented customer demand for the 787. I congratulate the global LCF team -- our design and production partners, our modification partner EGAT, and our incredible Boeing team -- for this remarkable achievement."

The flight test program is expected to last through the end of the year. The LCF also will complete more than 500 hours of ground testing in Taipei and Seattle combined. This comprehensive test program will ensure the LCF's reliability and ability to fly its intended mission.

After completing initial flight tests in Taiwan, during which the airplane's handling characteristics will be evaluated as well as ensuring the LCF is free from flutter and excessive vibration, the airplane will fly to Seattle's Boeing Field to complete the remainder of the flight test program. The ferry flight to Seattle is expected to occur mid-month. A fleet of three LCFs will ferry 787 assemblies between Nagoya, Japan; Grottaglie, Italy; Wichita, Kan. and Charleston, S.C., before flying them to the Boeing factory in Everett, Wash., for final assembly. The first two LCFs will enter service in early 2007; the third will follow later.

Since the 787 launch in April 2004, 32 customers have logged 420 orders and commitments, of which 377 are firm orders valued at $59 billion at current list prices, making the Dreamliner the most successful commercial airplane launch in history.

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