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SEATTLE, Nov. 16, 2010 /PRNewswire/ -- A Boeing (NYSE: BA) Next-Generation 737-800 in the new United Airlines livery successfully completed its first test flight late last week, signifying the start of certification for a package of 737 performance improvements. Testing and certification will continue through April 2011. Aerodynamic and engine changes included in the package will reduce fuel consumption by 2 percent. Boeing is phasing the changes into production mid-2011 through early 2012.

One percent of the savings comes from reducing resistance as air flows around the airplane. The upper and lower anti-collision lights change from round to a more aerodynamic, elongated teardrop shape. Wheel-well fairings are re-contoured to smooth the air flow near the main landing gear. A redesign of the environmental control system, exhaust vent and streamlined wing slat and spoiler trailing edges round out the aerodynamic changes.

CFM is introducing the new CFM56-7BE engine enhancement program to coincide with Boeing's airframe changes. Low- and high-pressure turbine modifications will result in a 1 percent reduction in fuel consumption. In addition, Boeing is optimizing the engine's primary nozzle and plug. Together, the changes result in cooler-running engines that may provide up to 4 percent lower maintenance costs.

Watch video of the first certification test flight and learn how engineers came up with the design improvements here: <http://bit.ly/a8T9oM>.

Boeing's continuous efforts to improve the Next-Generation 737 family have resulted in an accumulated 5 percent gain in fuel efficiency since the first airplane was delivered in 1998. The new improvements will give operators an airplane that is 7 percent more efficient than the first Next-Generation 737s delivered.

In late October, Boeing delivered its first two Next-Generation 737-800s with the new Boeing Sky Interior. The interior features new cove lighting and curving architecture that create a more open feel in the cabin. Updated sidewalls and window reveals add a modern feel, and larger stowage bins enable passengers to store more luggage while giving them more headroom. Deliveries to new operators continue each month.

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