

Boeing 737 MAX takes to skies for long-awaited test flight

June 29 2020, by Jason Redmond With Christophe Vogt In Washington



The Boeing 737 MAX has been grounded globally since March 2019 following two major crashes that together killed 346 people

US regulators conducted the first a test flight of the Boeing 737 MAX on Monday, a key step in recertifying the jet that has been grounded for

more than a year following two fatal crashes.

A MAX aircraft took off from Boeing Field in Seattle at 1655 GMT, a Federal Aviation Administration spokesperson said.

The test lasted several hours, and included two take offs and landings, before finally touching down around 2115 GMT, according to an AFP photographer.

The initial flight will be followed by additional trips expected over about three days, the FAA spokesperson said in a statement.

But though the certifications flights are a critical phase, the regulator stressed that the process for returning the once top-selling aircraft to the skies is not over.

"While the certification flights are an important milestone, a number of key tasks remain," the FAA spokesperson said, adding that the agency will be "deliberate" and "thoroughly review Boeing's work" before allowing the plane to return to service.

"We will lift the grounding order only after we are satisfied that the aircraft meets certification standards."

The MAX has been grounded worldwide since March 13, 2019, following an Ethiopian Airlines crash that killed 157 people. That catastrophe came just a few months after a Lion Air MAX crash that killed 189 people.



Nadia Milleron, mother of a victim of the Ethiopian Airlines crash, watches as FAA administrator Stephen Dickson leaves a hearing of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee on June 17, 2020, in Washington, DC

The troubling similarities between the two accidents, both of which occurred shortly after takeoff, along with the pilots' inability to regain control of the plane, led global aviation authorities to ground the model indefinitely.

For months, the US aerospace giant has been struggling to get the medium-haul aircraft—previously Boeing's biggest source of commercial plane orders—back into service.

The MAX's anti-stall flight system, the MCAS, was partially to blame

for both crashes. But other technical malfunctions, including one involving electrical wiring, were subsequently detected during the aircraft's modification process, slowing down its recertification.

Shares of Boeing opened sharply higher Monday and rose further following news the flight had taken off, closing at \$194.49, up 14.4 percent, and leading the Dow.



US regulators launched the first test flight of Boeing's grounded 737 MAX from Boeing Field in Seattle

Delay after delay

Civil aviation authorities cannot approve the modified model until they have examined how it performs in the air, and looked at the thousands of data points collected during the test flights.

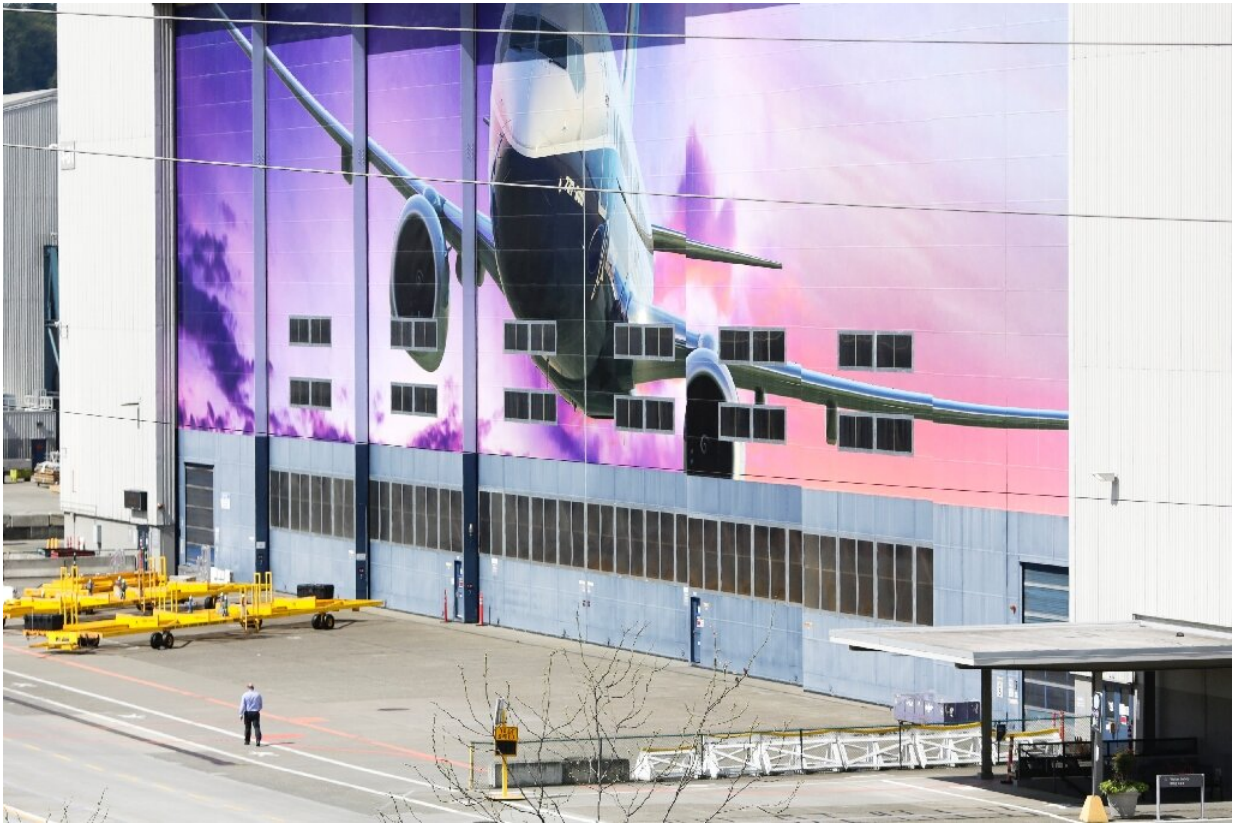
But beyond that Boeing still must develop pilot training protocols for the MAX that will be subject to public comment and a final review by a technical advisory board.

All MAX aircraft manufactured since the crashes also will need to be personally inspected by FAA staff, the agency said.

"The FAA has not made a decision on return to service," the agency said.

A few months ago, Boeing anticipated the MAX would be back in the skies in mid-2020. But the coronavirus pandemic, which resulted in travel restrictions and lockdown measures to try to slow its spread, upset the schedule.

Boeing needs to get the 737 MAX back in the air in order to pull itself out of a historic crisis.



Boeing anticipated the MAX would return to service in mid-2020, but the coronavirus pandemic, which resulted in travel restrictions and lockdown measures to try and slow its spread, has upset the schedule



The 737 MAX for more than two-thirds of Boeing's order book and is therefore crucial to the mid-term survival of the manufacturer—which, like the entire aviation industry, is suffering from the effects of the coronavirus crisis

The aircraft accounts for more than two-thirds of the company's order book and is therefore crucial to the survival of the manufacturer—which, like the entire aviation industry, is suffering from the effects of the coronavirus crisis.

The company already has made cutbacks to shore up its finances. At the end of April, Boeing released details on a downsizing plan to cut total headcount by 10 percent, or roughly 16,000 employees in all.

In March, credit ratings agency S&P downgraded its debt grade for

Boeing to BBB from A-, moving it into a speculative category.

Additional modifications on the MAX expected to be required by foreign aviation authorities also could add substantial costs to the program.

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