

Biggest-ever airliner order marks first day of Paris Air Show

June 19 2023, by Mathieu RABECHAULT, Tangi QUEMENER



Deafening flypasts by fighters like the F-35 drew all eyes in the crowd.

European aircraft maker Airbus got the Paris Air Show off to a soaring start on Monday with the announcement of the biggest-ever order for civil aircraft, as the French president joined a big crowd for the event's

return after a four-year COVID hiatus.

The 500-plane deal with low-cost Indian carrier IndiGo kicked off what organizers have billed as the "recovery airshow" after the coronavirus ravaged the sector and the biennial trade fair was canceled in 2021.

Fighter jets and civilian aircraft streaked across the sky while suited and uniformed delegations, including Ukrainian military officials and President Emmanuel Macron, toured the stands.

This year's airshow has a new focus on defense following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the industry's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint, with French President Emmanuel Macron arriving in a helicopter partly using sustainable aviation fuel.

Macron called for "restraint" to protect the environment but said measures for aviation should be "reasonable" rather than "punitive", adding that the world shouldn't "give up on growth".

Huge traffic jams around Le Bourget airport outside Paris were testament to the interest in this year's show, as aircraft makers field hundreds of orders and airlines brace for a near-record number of passengers this year.

The Ukraine conflict has also prompted countries to boost military spending, which could benefit aerospace defense firms.

While Russia has been excluded from the event, Ukrainian military officials toured the huge exhibition space at Paris-Le Bourget airport, some taking photos of missiles on display.



A Ukrainian delegation is among the crowd at the Paris Air Show.

'Passion for air hasn't disappeared'

Macron announced that Belgium is to be admitted as an observer to the French-German-Spanish Future Combat Air System (FCAS) program, which is seeking to develop the next generation of air combat technology.

Macron, closing a ministerial conference on European air defense, called it a "major development".

The FCAS is due to come into service by 2040, but has already suffered

numerous delays.

Also on the military front, Macron said that France, Estonia, Hungary, Belgium and Cyprus are to jointly purchase Mistral short-range surface-to-air missiles.

"This is a very fine example of sovereign cooperation between Europeans on a range that is entirely relevant and that was not sufficiently covered", the French leader said.

There were star turns for the Rafale fighter made by France's Dassault and the American F-35 jet, with hundreds of visitors turning their phone cameras skyward and some plugging their ears against the deafening flypasts.

Le Bourget offers a forum to announce deals with some 2,500 firms lining up to show off their latest planes, drones, helicopters and prototypes such as flying taxis.

With 125,000 square meters (1,350,000 square feet) of exhibition space—the equivalent of nearly 18 football pitches—around 320,000 visitors are expected during the week-long event.

"Passion for the air hasn't disappeared, that's good news," said Bertrand Godinot, easyJet's Netherlands and France director.



The Paris Air Show hopes to open a window into the future as projects for flying taxis take off.

Big deals

Along with the Farnborough airshow in England, which takes place in even numbered years, Le Bourget is a key sales event for the civil and defense industries.

Airbus and rival Boeing compete fiercely in announcing orders for aircraft running into the billions of dollars.

Monday's IndiGo-Airbus deal covers A320 family planes at a list price of \$55 billion.

Although closely held actual sale prices are usually lower, it marks the largest ever civil aviation order by volume, hailed by Airbus chief executive Guillaume Faury as "an enormous milestone".

Airbus and Boeing are also battling to solidify supply chains as they increase production to meet growing demand.

The United States has a strong presence with 425 exhibitors, while firms from 46 other nations are present.

China, which lifted COVID restrictions only at the beginning of this year, is also represented.

However, Beijing is not displaying its first homegrown medium-haul passenger jet, the C919, built to compete with the Airbus A320neo and Boeing 737 MAX.



French President Emmanuel Macron (L) sat with Airbus boss Guillaume Faury during an opening aerial demonstration.

Flying taxis

The airshow also hopes to open a window into the future as projects for flying taxis and other vertical take-off aircraft abound.

Several prototypes will be on display as part of a "Paris Air Mobility" exhibition to showcase the latest innovations that developers hope will change how people travel.

Macron arrived aboard Airbus' latest helicopter, the H160, in a flight fuelled with 30 percent sustainable aviation fuel before visiting the

European group's stand where it laid out its net-zero-by-2050 plan.

Macron had on Friday announced \$2.2 billion to help develop technologies to reduce aircraft emissions.

Air travel accounts for nearly three percent of global CO₂ emissions but serves only a small minority of the world's population.

With the industry targeting net zero emissions by mid-century, firms are turbocharging efforts to achieve it.

The initial focus is on SAF, made from sources such as municipal waste and agricultural waste.

But companies are also working to develop battery- and hydrogen-powered aircraft.

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Citation: Biggest-ever airliner order marks first day of Paris Air Show (2023, June 19) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-06-biggest-ever-airliner-day-paris-air.html>

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