

Made-in-China airliner shown overseas at Singapore Airshow

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Spectators watch members of South Korea's 'Black Eagle' aerobatics team performing during a preview of the Singapore Airshow in Singapore on February 18, 2024.

China's first domestically produced passenger jet will be presented to potential buyers in an international debut at Asia's biggest airshow,

which opens in Singapore on Tuesday.

With its C919 aircraft, Beijing wants to challenge the decades-long dominance of top plane-makers Airbus and Boeing while reducing its reliance on foreign technology.

The single-aisle model is a potential competitor to the market-leading A320, made by Europe's Airbus, and the 737 MAX from US-based Boeing—which will keep a low profile at the Singapore Airshow following a recent safety crisis.

At a media preview in the city-state on Sunday, the C919 made its maiden flight outside China, sporting a functional white, green and navy-blue livery.

It will take part in daily flying displays at the six-day event, and features among the static exhibits at a sprawling convention centre near Changi Airport.

The plane has been making [commercial flights](#) in China since May, and was displayed for the first time outside mainland China in Hong Kong in December.

But it has yet to attract buyers outside the country.

Although the airshow is a good opportunity for Beijing to show off the C919, finding a big-name buyer will be hard, said aviation analyst Shukor Yusof of Singapore-based consultancy Endau Analytics.

"There's still a stigma with the 'made-in-China' brand in the [aviation industry](#), even if China now leads the world in the electric vehicle market," he told AFP.

"It will take time for the C919 to land an order from a major carrier," he said, even though it's "a matter of when, not if, a top-tier airline buys a Chinese-made commercial jet".

The C919 is built by the state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), which has also brought its smaller, older ARJ21 jet to Singapore to fly and be displayed.



Members of the Sarang Helicopter Display Team of the Indian Air Force (IAF) perform with modified HAL Dhruv helicopters, also known as Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), during a preview of the Singapore Airshow in Singapore on February 18, 2024.

Boeing 'lying low'

More than 1,000 aviation and defense companies are taking part in the airshow, which is held every two years.

China, South Korea and the Czech Republic will have country pavilions for the first time, and Airbus is showcasing its new long-range A350-1000 plane.

But while Boeing will be present at the airshow, it is not presenting any physical commercial aircraft, unlike in previous years.

The company is still smarting from a near-catastrophic incident in January, when a fuselage panel on a Boeing 737 MAX 9 Alaska Airlines jet blew off mid-flight.

The incident, which caused only minor injuries, led the US Federal Aviation Administration to ground more than 170 MAX 9 planes for around three weeks.

"Boeing is intentionally lying low and avoiding the limelight as it struggles with an antiquated product line, the 737 family," Shukor said.

Organizers expect the show to draw 50,000 trade attendees from around the world—close to pre-pandemic levels.

A watered-down airshow was held in 2020 after many of the exhibitors pulled out, and the 2022 edition went ahead but without the two days open to the public.

"2018 was the highest we've ever had. We are close to the best we've ever had," said Leck Chet Lam, managing director of event organiser Experia.

This reflects the global recovery of air travel, he said.

"International passenger traffic has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels and is projected to more than double by 2040," said Cindy Koh, executive vice president of the Singapore Economic Development Board.

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