

Boeing's new 777X airliner makes first flight

January 25 2020, by Jason Redmond, With Christophe Vogt In Washington



The snow-covered Olympic Mountains are pictured in the background as a Boeing 777X airplane takes off on its inaugural flight at Paine Field in Everett, Washington in the United States on January 25, 2020

Boeing's new long-haul 777X airliner made its first flight on Saturday, a step forward for the company whose broader prospects remain clouded by the 737 MAX crisis.

The world's largest twin-engine aircraft landed at Boeing Field near Seattle after approximately four hours in the air, following months of delays and erratic weather in recent days.

High winds led to the maiden flight's postponement on Friday, and the company blamed weather for an earlier delay on Thursday, which was rainy.

A few minutes after 10:00 am local time (1800 GMT), the plane took off from the rain-slicked runway at Paine Field in Everett, Washington, home to Boeing's northwest US manufacturing site.

"Yes!" Boeing spokesman Josh Green shouted as the plane's wheels finally lifted off the tarmac.

Just minutes earlier, the pilots deployed the plane's winglets—folding wing tips—designed to improve the craft's fuel efficiency and make it possible for the plane, with the widest wing span ever from Boeing, to be accommodated at more airports.

The first flight was originally scheduled to take place in mid-2019 but was postponed due to problems with the new engine, manufactured by General Electric, and difficulties with the wings and software.



A Boeing 777X airplane taxis before taking off on its inaugural flight at Paine Field in Everett, Washington in the United States on January 25, 2020

Saturday marked the first of what is to be a series of in-flight tests. If they go well, Boeing will officially file for approval from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

With Boeing facing a crisis over its top-selling 737 MAX following two deadly crashes, the 777X is supposed to compete in the long-haul aircraft market with the A350 made by rival European aircraft manufacturer Airbus.

The flight was "a demonstration to the world that we know what we are doing. We know how to do aircraft designed safely and instill trust in the

public," said Stanley Deal, president and chief executive of Boeing Commercial Airplanes.

Major airlines including Emirates, Lufthansa, Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines and Qatar Airways have placed some 340 orders for the 777X.

The first deliveries of the new model, with maximum capacity of 384 to 426 passengers depending on the configuration, are not expected before early 2021, instead of mid-2020 as initially planned.

The aircraft encountered significant problems during pressurization tests in September.



Boeing employees and others watch as a Boeing 777X airplane taxis before taking off on its inaugural flight at Paine Field in Everett, Washington in the

United States on January 25, 2020

Business down

Boeing's business has also been weakened by a lack of firm orders from Chinese airlines for its 787 Dreamliner, which is expected to see production cuts.

The 777X has a range of 16,200 to 13,500 kilometers depending on its configuration and the number of passengers aboard, according to the Boeing website. It is also extremely fuel-efficient, an important consideration at a time when passengers are increasingly concerned about carbon emissions.

Its list price is between \$410 million to \$442 million, though customers often negotiate discounts.

US air safety regulators could clear the 737 MAX to return to service before mid-year, a person close to the process said Friday.

The plane has been grounded since March following two deadly crashes, in Ethiopia and Indonesia. On Tuesday, Boeing announced that it did not expect to win regulatory approval until mid-2020.



A pilot gives a thumbs up as he taxis a Boeing 777X airplane before taking off on its inaugural flight at Paine Field in Everett, Washington in the United States on January 25, 2020

In addition to the crisis of confidence, Boeing is seeking some \$10 billion in loans to deal with swelling costs for the MAX.

Boeing suspended production of the MAX this month but Chief Executive David Calhoun said this week the company plans to begin ramping up production of the model in anticipation of winning regulatory approval to restart service.

Calhoun began as CEO earlier in January following the ouster of Dennis Muilenburg, whose tenure was rocked by the MAX crisis which led to

deteriorating relations between the company and the FAA.

Calhoun aims to turn the company around, and has highlighted restoring Boeing's reputation with regulators, customers and other stakeholders as an imperative.

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