

FEATURES

Boeing Rolls Out Dreamliner for the World

By Dominic Gates

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EVERETT — After five years of development, Boeing on Sunday unveiled the first 787 Dreamliner and put on a grand global show to celebrate.

The 787 was towed from the paint hangar into position outside the huge assembly bay, while inside a crowd of some 15,000 employees, customers, politicians and invited guests waited expectantly.

When the huge doors of the bay slowly opened, the crowd greeted the new jet with a great roar and a sea of raised cameras.

The market has greeted the jet with similar enthusiasm. Airlines have placed 677 firm orders to date, and jet-leasing companies are offering the Dreamliner at an astonishing premium rate of \$1 million a month.

The event made Everett the focal point of a worldwide party for a jet designed and built around the world.

It was early Monday morning in Japan, nighttime in Italy, early evening in Charleston, S.C., and a hot late afternoon in Wichita, Kan. But at partner sites in each location, workers joined in with gusto via a giant video screen linked by satellite.

It was the first rollout of a brand-new Boeing airplane since the 777 in 1994.

In his speech, Boeing Chief Executive Jim McNerney said such an opportunity comes along only “about once in a generation.”

For this one, he said, “Boeing has gathered the best ideas and brightest minds from throughout the world, separated to be sure by

continents and culture, but unified by a common vision.”

The 787 is the world’s first large commercial airplane made mostly of carbon-fiber composites. Another first for Boeing is its use of suppliers around the world to manufacture major pieces of the jet before shipping them to Everett for final assembly.

Emphasizing the global aspect of the business, the CEOs of the 47 airlines that have ordered the airplane paraded to the stage at one point, each accompanied by a colorfully uniformed flight attendant.

The first airplane is heavier than it should be. It’s got 1,000 temporary fasteners holding things in place. It’s missing some systems and final wiring. But it’s well on track, according to Boeing and its customers. And the airplane looked cool with its smoothly contoured nose and thin hooked wings.

So Sunday the atmosphere was joyous.

Boeing rookie

Among the workers in the crowd was 21-year-old Nicholas Welsh, who joined Boeing in January after coming to Seattle from the Tri-Cities last fall.

His job as a 787 manufacturing technician is to crawl inside the Dreamliner’s wing.

“I seal. I torque bolts and fasteners. I do wiring,” Welsh said.

“It’s pretty cool,” he said. “I got to bring my dad from the Tri-Cities.” His dad was beaming proudly.



Boeing on Sunday unveiled the first 787 Dreamliner and put on a grand global show to celebrate.

The heads of most of the world's top airlines and senior Boeing executives past and present were among the VIPs at the Everett factory for the ceremony, which was emceed by former NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw.

Tens of thousands more watched live at various remote sites, including some 22,000 Boeing employees and retirees at Qwest Field in Seattle.

"For years you have been connecting the world, today you are changing the world," said Gov. Christine Gregoire, who spoke at the Qwest Field event.

In a gracious congratulatory letter sent to McNerney, the head of rival Airbus, Louis Gallois, said it was "a great day in aviation history."

"Even if tomorrow Airbus will get back to the business of competing vigorously, today is Boeing's day — a day to celebrate the 787," Gallois wrote.

Global jet

The global outsourcing of production was on the minds of two attendees: former Gov. Gov. Gary Locke, who pushed through the tax-break legislation that persuaded Boeing to keep

final assembly here; and Mark Blondin, former Machinists union District 751 president and now the union's aerospace coordinator.

Locke is now in private practice as a lawyer focused on trade with Asia. He's off to China in a week to promote Washington products. He still sees the successful effort to persuade Boeing to choose the Everett plant to assemble the 787 as a turning point for business in the state.

"We have so much here we are rightfully proud of. We are world leaders in various sectors," said Locke, standing by the 787's huge tires.

"We're leaders in this," he said, pointing to the jet. "It'll mean a lot of jobs here for Washington."

For Blondin, in attendance with his wife and young son, the occasion was "bittersweet."

"It's a beautiful airplane," he said. "You've seen the future here. If they sell a lot, it'll mean more jobs here. We would have liked to have got a lot more."

There's certainly no stopping the Dreamliner in the global marketplace.

Steve Udvar-Hazy, CEO of International Lease Finance Corp. (ILFC), the world's largest aircraft lessor and the biggest Dreamliner customer, said he already has nine customers signed up to take the jet at about \$1 million a month, compared with \$600,000 for a 767.

In an interview at the rollout, Hazy expressed confidence in Boeing's ability to overcome all problems, saying he expected no serious slippage in the delivery dates.

Hazy also suggested the rush to buy the plane is far from over. He said big legacy carriers, such as American, Delta, United and British Airways, still haven't ordered.

"As soon as the big guys get on the train, and place orders for potentially hundreds of these aircraft, there'll be no positions available until 2015 or 2016," Hazy said.

It's that prospect, he suggested, that's fueling smaller airlines' rush to buy.

Another selling point that has suddenly taken on new importance is environmental concerns over fossil-fuel emissions. Boeing has bragged about how the 787 is quieter on takeoffs and landings, and uses 20 percent less fuel than any previous commercial jet.

Jeff Hawk, who heads the 787's environmental efforts, said Friday the Dreamliner consumes about one gallon of fuel per seat per 100 miles of travel.

"That's less than a typical sedan," said Hawk, "and a half to a third the fuel consumption of an SUV."

Chris Browne, managing director of First Choice Airways, a U.K.-based tour operator that has ordered a dozen Dreamliners, said the airline is under pressure from major British institutional investors to prove its green credentials.

"The 787 has become a large part of our commitment to trying to help the environment," said Browne, who saw the rollout.

Despite the recent problems with fastener shortages, and gaps appearing between fuselage sections, the 787 program appears still on track. And although the first airplane needed much installation work in Everett that should have been done at partner plants, that issue is diminishing.

"With each unit we get delivered, either to Everett or to [the Charleston fuselage assembly plant], the elements of the airplane are more and more complete," said Scott Strode, head of 787 production.

Most of the fuselage of airplane No. 2 stood partly assembled at the back of the bay Sunday.

Serious work begins again today to get plane No. 1 ready for its first flight in September. By then, those temporary fasteners must be replaced and systems installed, as well as the wiring that connects the systems. Everything must be ground-tested thoroughly.

Then the airplane will fly. That dramatic day is up next.

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