

Boeing's 787 Dreamliner set for maiden flight

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File photo shows models of Boeings Dreamliner aircraft that will take off for the first time Tuesday, barring last minute hiccups, in a critical milestone for the overdue jetliner seen as the future for the aerospace giant.

Boeing's new 787 Dreamliner jet takes to the skies for the first time Tuesday, in a critical milestone for the problem-plagued aircraft seen as key to the future of the US aerospace giant.

The first flight of the revolutionary new "green" passenger jet comes after more than two years of production problems that pushed back delivery of the first plane to Japanese carrier All Nippon Airways to late 2010.

Boeing is hanging its future hopes on the plane -- its first new model in over a decade which draws on the huge advances made in aviation

technology and is capable of flying long-haul routes using up to 20 percent less fuel.

Up to 50 percent of the mid-size, twin-aisle 787 Dreamliner is made of lightweight composite materials, such as carbon fiber-reinforced resin, compared with 12 percent on the Boeing 777, contributing to fuel efficiency, the company said.

The aircraft passed its final functional tests Saturday and has been cleared for takeoff on its maiden flight Tuesday over Puget Sound and Washington state, depending on weather conditions.

On the maiden flight, captains Mike Carriker and Randy Neville will test key systems, such as the environmental control systems, hydraulics, structures and engines, and stability.

Onboard equipment will record and transmit real-time data to a test team, the company said.

During the final taxi testing Saturday, the airplane reached a top speed of about 130 knots (150 miles per hour, 240 kilometers per hour), and the pilots lifted the nose gear from the pavement, Boeing said.

"Our pilots told me the airplane performed beautifully," said Mike Delaney, vice president and chief project engineer for the 787.

"We're going through and analyzing the data to ensure we're ready for first flight. From evaluations we've done so far, everything looks good."

Boeing announced last week that the Dreamliner was set to fly in a "window" opening Tuesday at 10:00 am (1800 GMT) at Paine Field near its plant in Everett, Washington state.

The Chicago-based company, vying with European rival Airbus for commercial supremacy, is betting its cutting-edge Dreamliner is the winning vision for the future of global commercial aviation.

The promise of lower fuel costs in a sector where profit margins are already razor-thin has whetted the appetites of several key players in the airline industry.

Tuesday's scheduled flight confirmed Boeing's latest calendar, as announced in June, after five previous delays in the 787 Dreamliner program to fix a structural problem.

Boeing launched the program in April 2004 and initially had planned to deliver the first airplane to ANA in the first half of 2008, a delivery now set for late 2010.



Boeing's new 787 Dreamliner jet, seen here in 2007, is poised for its first test flight Tuesday, a critical milestone for the overdue aircraft seen as key to the future of the US aerospace giant.

It faces stiff competition in the commercial aviation market from Airbus, a unit of the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company.

Airbus is working on a new long-haul A350 plane aimed at competing with the Dreamliner and expected to fly in mid-2013.

Boeing says it has 840 orders on its books from 55 customers for the cutting-edge plane, which it claims is the "fastest-selling all-new jetliner in aviation history."

United Airlines announced last week it would buy 25 Dreamliners, as well as 25 A350s, with the option to buy 50 more of each aircraft.

But the series of delays in the 787 program contributed to a 1.6-billion-dollar loss in the third quarter and Boeing has slashed this year's earnings guidance by more than a third.

Airline companies that have announced cancelled orders for the delay-plagued 787 include Russian carrier S7, Dubai-based aircraft leasing company LCAL and Australia's Qantas.

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