

Paris Air Show peek: Wide-body battle and drones (Update)

June 16 2013, by Lori Hinnant



A Russian Antonov158 a passenger plane, arrives on the tarmac for the Paris Air Show in le Bourget, North of Paris, Sunday, June 16, 2013. The Paris Air Show will open on June 17 at Le Bourget. (AP Photo/Jacques Brinon)

The Paris Air Show, which opens for business on Monday, brings hundreds of aircraft to the skies around the French capital, the usual tense competition between aircraft manufacturers Boeing and Airbus, and a slew of innovations large and small. Here's what to look for over the show:

BATTLE OF THE WIDE-BODIES

The much-anticipated Airbus A350 flew for the first time on Friday, launching a new air race between the European plane maker and Boeing for long-haul wide-body aircraft.

Boeing has dominated the market so far, but troubles with the lithium ion batteries in its 787 Dreamliner are giving customers a reason to give a close look at Airbus' first all-new plane in eight years. The CEO of Airbus parent EADS, Tom Enders, has said he expects a "few hundred" new orders. Boeing executives, meanwhile, downplayed the air show's importance for orders, noting that the two companies have historically split the commercial aircraft market.

A year ago, at the Paris Air Show's sister event in Britain, Boeing beat Airbus for the number of orders announced. The U.S. company took in \$37 billion in orders and commitments, well above Airbus' \$16.9 billion.

But the announcements during the air shows are not always a reliable indicator of business since prices are often negotiated down heavily and big orders don't always coincide with the event.

The race for the title of biggest plane maker is as tight as ever. Over the whole of 2012, Airbus delivered 588 planes. That was a record, but one Boeing beat with 601 deliveries, the first time since 2003 it came out on top.



A French drone aircraft is displayed at the Paris Air Show in le Bourget, North of Paris, Sunday, June 16, 2013. The Paris Air Show will open on June 17 at Le Bourget. (AP Photo/Jacques Brinon)

NO HANDS ON DECK

They have swooped into wildfires to take temperatures and tracked animals across Africa. They have guided a fuel tanker to safety through icy waters. Drones are increasingly being used for non-military purposes and are expected to feature prominently at the Paris Air Show.

There are still tough restrictions on their flight for safety reasons, but while the Federal Aviation Authority works on new rules, the makers of drones will aim to show off innovation and technical prowess at the show. Eurocopter, a company based in France, will showcase new technology that can transform a manned helicopter into one that flies without a pilot.



A French military officer walks past a Eurofighter (Finmeccanica) on the tarmac for the Paris Air Show in le Bourget, North of Paris, Sunday, June 16, 2013. The Paris Air Show will open on June 17 at Le Bourget. (AP Photo/Jacques Brinon)

EVEN IN PARIS, SEQUESTRATION TAKES TOLL

American fighter jets aren't taking to the skies above Paris, nor will they be seen on the ground, for the first time in more than two decades thanks to the U.S. government's spending cuts - the infamous 'sequestration'.

The U.S. pavilion remains the largest, but the event will be less of a sales showcase for latest military hardware and more a place for suppliers to meet up with potential customers.



A man walks past the Aircraft Agusta Westland "Project Zero" all-electric tiltrotor technology on display for the Paris Air Show in le Bourget, North of Paris, Sunday, June 16, 2013. The Paris Air Show will open on June 17 at Le Bourget. (AP Photo/Jacques Brinon)

Russia, on the other hand, is looking to make a splash by presenting fighter jets and military helicopters at the show for the first time since 2001. The Sukhoi manufacturer will showcase its Su-35, a twin-engine multipurpose fighter, for the first time outside Russia. Britain and France also will have fighter jets on display.

"It's two different trends between commercial aircraft and defense," said Eric Bernardini, a consultant for AlixPartners who follows the aerospace industry.

EVERY LITTLE BIT COUNTS

Less flashy but just as important for the industry will be the myriad technological innovations that parts suppliers will come to Paris to present. The biggest issue? The cost of fuel.



A worker cleans an E190 Embraer aircraft prior to opening the Paris Air Show in le Bourget, North of Paris, Sunday, June 16, 2013. The Paris Air Show will open on June 17 at Le Bourget. (AP Photo/Jacques Brinon)

The price of jet fuel has more than tripled worldwide since 2003—a trend both jet manufacturers and airlines expect to continue. Electric- or solar-powered commercial flights are wildly improbable and biofuels aren't yet economically viable, so airlines are looking to improve mileage any way possible.

For long-haul flights, that means more carbon-fiber in airplane bodies and other design tweaks, such as electric motors for taxiing. For

passengers, it means no end in sight on extra baggage fees.

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