

Taking to the sky: Airshow ready for take off

July 12 2014, by Danica Kirka



In this file photograph taken July 15, 2008, people wander around a life-size model of US planemaker Lockheed Martin's F-35 Lightning Joint Strike Fighter II, during the Farnborough aerospace show, in Farnborough, England. A lot is at stake in the Farnborough International Airshow, the aviation industry's biggest annual event which opens Monday, July 14, 2014. The trade show is expected to see the first presentation of the world's most advanced fighter jet, new commercial aircraft as well as a host of new technological advances that promise to give a glimpse of the future of flying. (AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis, file)

A lot is at stake in the Farnborough International Airshow, the aviation

industry's biggest annual event, which opens Monday.

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Held just outside of London, the show features 1,500 exhibitors from 40 countries and some 100,000 industry representatives. Manufacturers who attend find their closest comrades — and their most bitter competitors. Aviation giants Boeing and Airbus are expected to announce a string of new orders in their annual race for the title of the world's biggest plane maker.

Here's a brief look at what are expected to be the highlights of the show.

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THE SOUND OF SILENCE. OR NOT

Above all, there are two planes that aviation experts want to see at Farnborough—the F-35 Lightning II fighter and the Airbus A350—two feats of engineering that offer a contrast in the world of the skies.

The F-35 is the sort of plane that puts a rumble in your chest. What's important is that it combines stealth, maneuverability and attack capabilities in a single aircraft, so the U.S. and its allies can replace a variety of aging planes with the F-35. It's also loud and fast, the sort of thing that gets aviation enthusiasts excited.

"You don't get a new generation aircraft very often," aviation expert Howard Wheeldon said. "This is something very, very new."

But there is doubt it will appear. The fighter, made by a group of companies led by Lockheed Martin, was grounded in the U.S. after an engine fire last month, and it remains unclear whether it will be on display at Farnborough. The F-35 missed its international debut at a military air show this week so there will be a lot of pressure to get it to Farnborough. While it's not unusual for planes in development to have problems, it's embarrassing to miss an event where you can strut your stuff before the politicians and the cameras.

On the other end of the noise spectrum is the other headline attraction, the A350, which is supposed to be very, very quiet.

Airbus's newest plane, the A350, has various configurations designed to seat 250 to 400 passengers and compete with a variety of Boeing aircraft. Airbus says this is the first [commercial aircraft](#) built mainly from "advanced materials," which will make it 25 percent more fuel efficient than existing planes. It's also supposed to be very quiet and offer more room for passengers.

Airbus is under pressure to give it a good showing and announce some new sales after Dubai-based airline Emirates canceled a huge order for 70 of them last month.

JUST DON'T CALL THEM DRONES

They are unmanned aerial systems or vehicles to those in the know. Drones have a reputation as military aircraft that kill people. Besides that, some people find little whizzy things in the sky a bit scary. When the Los Angeles Kings won the Stanley Cup, for example, joyful fans attacked a drone hovering over the scene, throwing objects at it and knocking it into the crowd, where it was smashed to bits.

But manufacturers are hoping they can offer a makeover, promoting an array of other uses, from policing and surveillance to sports photography and wildlife monitoring. The Teal Group estimates that \$89.1 billion will be spent on drones in the next decade, and some analysts suggest that the next aviation giant will be a drone maker.

"It's probably the most dynamic, innovative air sector at the moment," said Tim Robinson, editor in chief of AEROSPACE, the monthly magazine of the Royal Aeronautical Society. He compared it to the early days of aviation, with designers trying all sorts of variations to make their systems fly. "It's a little bit like the Wild West."

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