Interview: Airbus is ready for pilotless jets - are you?

June 17 2019, by Angela Charlton

In this Friday, June 14, 2019 file photo, Chief Commercial Officer of Airbus, Christian Scherer, speaks to the media during a briefing ahead of the Paris Air Show in Paris. The chief salesman for Airbus says his company already has the technology to fly passenger planes without pilots at all - and is working on winning over regulators and travelers to the idea. Scherer also said in an interview Monday, June 17 that Airbus hopes to be selling hybrid or electric passenger jets by around 2035. (AP Photo/Michel Euler, file)

The chief salesman for Airbus says his company already has the technology to fly passenger planes without pilots at all—and is working on winning over regulators and travelers to the idea.

Christian Scherer also said in an interview with The Associated Press on Monday that Airbus hopes to be selling hybrid or electric passenger jets by around 2035.

While the company is still far from ready to churn out battery-operated jumbo jets, Scherer said Airbus already has "the technology for autonomous flying" and for planes flown by just one pilot.

"This is not a matter of technology—it's a matter of interaction with the regulators, the perception in the traveling public," he told The Associated Press.

"When can we introduce it in large commercial aircraft? That is a matter we are discussing with regulators and customers, but technology-wise, we don't see a hurdle."

Several manufacturers are presenting unmanned aircraft at the Paris Air Show, primarily for military purposes—and some are also proposing pilotless "air taxis" of the future.

When it comes to autonomous passenger jets, safety is an obvious concern. It's an issue that is on many minds after two deadly crashes of the Boeing 737 Max jet that have implicated problematic anti-stall software.

Scherer said the crashes "highlighted and underlined the need for absolute, uncompromising safety in this industry, whether from Airbus,

Boeing or any other plane."

While he said Airbus' sales streategy hasn't changed as a result of the crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia, "there is a capacity need that materialized as a result of this, and naturally you have airlines that are frustrated over capacity, that are looking for answers."

Airbus announced several orders Monday as the air show kicked off, while Boeing had an anemic day as it works to win back trust from customers.

Scherer forecast continued growth in the aviation industry after several boom years, predicting the world will need at least 37,000 new aircraft in the next 20 years, especially in Asia—and that eventually the whole industry will stop creating emissions and "decarbonize."

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