

AIR TRANSPORT GUY NORRIS / SEATTLE

Boeing to propose Quiet 747 family

Customer surveys and postponed 747X prompt new plan

Boeing plans to begin formally offering airlines new 'quiet' versions of the 747-400 and -400ER families early this year for possible first deliveries as soon as late 2003.

The move comes in the wake of intensive customer surveys and the shelving of the 747X effort in 2001. "Instead of an 'improved' 747, we're talking about the Quiet aircraft," says 747 vice president and general manager Jeff Peace, who took over in November from recently retired Walt Orlowski.

"Instead of saying these are the aircraft we can do, we are thinking about what the 747 capability improvements could be.

"We are therefore looking at areas like improved ton/mile costs, higher reliability, a bit more range, increased volume and reduced operating costs as we understand the capability needs of the airlines. It's more of an evolutionary approach," he adds.

The Quiet 747 package will apply to both the standard 396,900kg (875,000lb) maximum take-off weight variants and the higher gross weight, 412,770kg -400ER passenger and Freighter versions.

It will focus on performance improvements to engines, changes to aerodynamic surfaces and several noise-reduction features.

"We are looking at improving the aerodynamics for higher and faster performance, changes to engine nacelles for noise and improvements in thrust characteristics from existing engine types," says Peace.

"Noise targets will include Chapter 4, and we'd like to get to QC2 [London Heathrow airport noise grading]. Potentially we will take the 747 community noise-levels to comparable levels with the 777," he adds.

Engine noise reduction features will include an increased inlet acoustic lining area, as well as chevrons on both primary and secondary nozzles.

Drooped ailerons and raked tips are also being studied as one aspect of aerodynamic improvements, which, along with higher thrust, will be needed to boost take-off and climb performance.

"We also plan to build changes into the flight management computer so we can use the steeper climb," Peace adds. Although available for new-build standard and Longer Range models, Boeing says that not all features will be cost-effective to retrofit.

Details of the Quiet 747 plan emerge as Boeing marks the 90% design release milestone for the -400ER and -400ERF models. Major assembly for the first -400ER passenger model is set to commence on 8 February with roll-out in June.

The aircraft will then undergo a four-month flight-test programme, primarily associated with performance trials such as nautical air miles range evaluation. Delivery to launch customer Qantas, which has ordered six, is set for October.

Assembly of the first freighter begins around the time of the -400ER rollout and, following a shorter test programme, is also scheduled to lead to first delivery in October.

Five -400ERFs have been ordered to-date by International Lease Finance, the first of which will be leased to Air France.

The -400ER will have a 777-style interior, and additional fuel in an auxiliary tank housed forward of the wing to enable up to 241,370litres (63,765USgal) to be carried. This provides for up to 805km (435nm) extra range, or a 6,800kg bigger payload.

The -400ERF, which has been structurally adapted to be almost identical to the current -400E, with the exception of the strengthened main undercarriage, will have up to 525nm additional range, or 9,525kg extra payload. Max payload capability goes up to 122,525kg.

Briefing

Passenger packs shoe with explosive

SECURITY A passenger on an American Airlines Paris-Miami Boeing 767 flight on 22 December allegedly tried to detonate explosive packed into one of his shoes, but was restrained by other passengers and crew. He now awaits trial in the USA. The man, Richard Reid, had a valid UK passport, a single ticket but no visa and did not check in any luggage. American Airlines chief executive officer Don Carty says his Paris staff warned the French authorities to check the man, whom they described as "suspicious", and as a result he missed his first flight. Carty says that it was only after the French authorities had cleared him that they allowed him to board.

Honeywell pays \$440m to settle lawsuit

NAVIGATION Honeywell has agreed to pay Northrop Grumman \$440 million to settle a 11-year antitrust and patent infringement suits relating to illegal monopolisation of the inertial reference systems market for civil aircraft. The suit was originally brought by Litton prior to its acquisition by Northrop Grumman.

EU supports Galileo, but not with cash

SATELLITE NAVIGATION The European Union's (EU) Council of Ministers expressed its backing for the Galileo satellite navigation programme at its meeting last month, but vital decisions on further funding for the struggling project are unlikely to be made until March. The failure of EU members to commit the necessary €450 million (\$406 million) to the programme has prompted European transport commissioner Loyola de Palacio to stress that Europe must make decisions on the programme soon or it will miss its 2008 start-up date. The EU council is calling for a funding decision in March decisions on programme management to be made in June. Meeting the schedule is seen as crucial to gaining sufficient market share.

China hands Israel shock Phalcon claim

COMPENSATION China has surprised Israel with a massive \$2 billion compensation claim over the cancellation of the Phalcon airborne early warning aircraft programme. The USA forced Israel to abandon the Phalcon sale to China in 2000 by threatening to cut military aid to Israel. Tel Aviv expected a claim of around \$500 million. Israeli sources says China does not expect to get the full \$2 billion, but the figure reflects Beijing's anger. China had already paid \$200 million for the first Phalcon.

Let 410 suffers two fatal crashes

SAFETY Bad weather appears to have been a factor in two Let 410 fatal accidents. On 14 December an Eagle Air Let 410A (5X-CMF) crashed into the Geti hills around 22nm (40km) east of its take-off aerodrome at Bunya, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. All four passengers and two crew were killed. On 16 December a HeliAndes Let 410UVP (HK-4175X) hit the Il Silencio mountain in heavy rain and high wind only 4min after the take-off from Medellin, Colombia, killing both pilots and all 14 passengers.

Further uncertainty in Belgium

CREDITORS The uncertainty surrounding Belgium's air transport industry continued as 2001 came to an end with the Brussels Court of Commerce removing creditor protection from Sabena Interservice Centre (SIC), the holding company for the bankrupt airlines' subsidiaries such as Delta Air Transport and Sabena Technics. Negotiations are underway to agree a plan with creditors not to call in debts from SIC, a move which could bankrupt the subsidiaries and jeopardise plans by Belgian industrial consortium Air Holding to develop DAT, possibly in a merger with Virgin Express. Sabena's receiver has approved the sale of DAT to the consortium for a single euro. Meanwhile, local aviation entrepreneur Freddy Van Gaver says plans to launch new long-haul carrier VG Airlines are progressing to the point where he expects to start Airbus A330-200 services to the USA from Brussels by April.