AIRBUS COMMITS TO FUTURE OF A380 AIRCRAFT

News / Manufacturer

European planemaker Airbus has given its backing to the long-term future of the A380 superjumbo, after finally starting to break even on the programme.

The Toulouse-based manufacturer assembled 27 A380s in 2015, taking the total number of superjumbos built to 179, with 13 airlines.

Airbus announced a new order for three A380s from an un-named customer, thought to be Japan's All Nippon Airways, giving a backlog of 140 aircraft.

John Leahy, Airbus' chief operating officer, customers, said that with a production rate of 27 aircraft a year, the A380 had broken even, and that he believed the programme had a bright future. “We are happy with the A380,” he said. “We have quite a few years' production ahead of us. There will be new customers in 2016.”

The wings for the A380 are designed at Airbus' facility at Filton in Bristol, and are made at Broughton in North Wales, employing hundreds of engineers. There had been suggestions from analysts in the early part of 2015 that Airbus might cancel the A380 programme due to sluggish sales. But Leahy said airlines were increasingly understanding the benefits that ultra high capacity

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aircraft could bring to their business. “The A380 is well liked by airlines flying it and by the travelling public.

“However, it takes a long time to sell it and for airlines to make a decision to move into the [ultra high capacity] category. We're working diligently with the airlines.”

Leahy's comments on the A380 came as Airbus unveiled its annual results, which showed that it delivered 635 aircraft in 2015. These deliveries comprised: 491 A320 family aircraft; 103 A330s; 27 A380s; and 14 A350 XWBs.

The production achievement meant that Airbus’ aircraft deliveries in 2015 were up for the 13th year in a row, surpassing the previous year-end delivery record of 629 aircraft – set in 2014.

Other notable milestones in 2015 included certification of the A320neo by the aviation authorities on both sides of the Atlantic, along with progress made on the A350 programme’s next variant, the A350-1000 – whose major components and structures are now taking shape across various production sites. Likewise, parts are now in production for the first A330neo – with the machining of its first engine pylon and centre wing-box components.

Airbus also expanded globally, opening its first factory in the US, at Mobile on Alabama’s Gulf Coast, where between 40 and 50 A320 Family aircraft will be produced annually by 2018.

Furthermore, in 2015 Airbus launched three new incremental aircraft developments which include: the Long-Range version of the A321neo which will offer transatlantic operation; the Regional version of the A330 which is optimised to seat up to 400 passengers on missions up to 3,000nm; and the Ultra-Long-Range version of the A350-900, capable of 19-hour flights.

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