AIRBUS SEES REVAMP OF SUPERJUMBO AFTER 2022 AMID SLOW A380 SALES

News / Manufacturer

It may be almost a decade or longer before Airbus Group SE debuts an improved version of its little-loved A380 superjumbo jet as the European planemaker tries to convince airlines that there's demand for such a large plane, the chief executive officer of the airliner unit said.

Some carriers "don't love the A380" because many have become more conservative in recent years, focusing on protecting market share rather than expanding with larger planes, Airbus CEO Fabrice Bregier said Thursday at the monthly Wings Club luncheon in New York. A newer model, which could feature a stretched cabin and improved engines, probably won't be available until after 2022, he said.

"Our problem is to justify that such a big aircraft has a market," Bregier said. "Later on, there will be an A380neo, supported by Emirates and a few other customers, but we need a business case."

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The comments come about a week after Airbus's sales chief said at the Dubai Air Show that a revamped A380 may emerge by 2022.

Sales Drought

The superjumbo, generally seating about 550 passengers but capable of carrying more than 800, is suffering a sales drought that is eating into the production backlog and threatening the long-term future of the model. The Toulouse, France-based company has won only 317 orders since the A380 first went on offer in 2000. Airbus sales chief John Leahy said in Dubai that he's in negotiations to sell as many as 32 additional A380s, possibly by the end of this year.

Emirates, the A380's biggest customer, has pushed Airbus to make improvements to the plane and wants the company to add more fuel-efficient engines, something Airbus has said it won't do for just one customer. Airbus has said that if it does offer new engines, they would likely be the XWB engines now made by Rolls-Royce Plc for Airbus's smaller, twin-jet A350.

Bregier has said that as the market doubles in size every 15 years, Airbus may need a "light stretch" of the A380 that would offer more seats.

The executive said that the broader outlook for Airbus was "very positive" and that he didn't see any so-called aircraft bubble, challenging comments by some industry commentators that aircraft producers have built more aircraft than are required by airline customers.

The planemaker also expects to win certification from regulators by the end of this month for its A320neo powered by engines from Pratt & Whitney, Bregier said. Certification of an A320neo to be powered by engines from General Electric Co.'s and Safran SA's CFM International venture is on track for certification in 2016, he said.

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