

At its 787 Dreamliner factory, Boeing prepares for takeoff

June 2 2023, by Juliette MICHEL



A Boeing 787 Dreamliner is seen on the assembly line in North Charleston, South Carolina.

As airlines seek to fulfill customers' growing post-pandemic appetites for long-haul travel, Boeing is aiming to speed up production of its 787

Dreamliners after a period plagued by repeated delivery interruptions due to manufacturing defects.

At a hangar in the US East Coast state of South Carolina, the [plane](#) begins to take shape on its first assembly line—here, the wings, cockpit, cabin and tail are still in separate pieces.

It will take about a month for the entire aircraft to come together, with the final touches added later, in the parking lot.

The US aerospace giant has already managed to up its manufacturing rate from fewer than two 787s per month in 2021 to four, and is hoping to get up to five by the end of the year.

On the second assembly line in the hangar, located in the city of North Charleston, three completed airplanes are inspected. They had to be returned for adjustments, after the discovery of several production flaws beginning in 2020.

There are still several dozen other planes under inspection, but Boeing plans to move that [review process](#) to its factory in Everett, in Washington state, by the end of the year.

That will allow them to devote the second assembly line in South Carolina solely to plane construction, meaning they can ramp up to 10 787s per month by 2025 or 2026.



Boeing 787 Dreamliners are built at the aviation company's North Charleston, South Carolina, assembly plant on May 30, 2023.

That would bring the factory close to Boeing's pre-pandemic production rate of 14 jets per month, which was achieved by splitting 787 construction between South Carolina and Washington state, before it was all consolidated to the East Coast in 2021.

Boeing says it's not worried about potential cancelations from airline clients unhappy with the delays.

"Our problem right now is more to just getting these planes in the hands of the customers," Lane Ballard, the 787 program's general manager said

during a press visit to Boeing's South Carolina locations Tuesday and Wednesday, ahead of the Paris Air Show later this month.

Sales rebound

Despite the rebound in sales of its flagship medium-haul 737 MAX last year—giving the company its best delivery numbers since 2018—Boeing is pinning its financial hopes on the 787, after four consecutive years in the red.



Boeing's 787 long-haul plane first began flying in 2011.

Recent months have finally seen an uptick in orders for large planes, the market for which was already suffering before the drop in long-haul air traffic during COVID lockdowns.

Boeing has historically dominated the high-margin long-haul manufacturing scene with its 787 and 777 configurations, competing with Airbus's A350 and A330.

Now, with Boeing no longer producing its 747 [jumbo jet](#), the lag on its 777 passenger model and the five-year delay in certification for its 777X, set for 2025, the company is counting on the 787.

It took a gamble on the 787 line—which launched in 2004 and began flying in 2011—by increasing its use of carbon fiber composites for the fuselage and wings. As a result, the plane is lighter and requires less fuel.

Many of the aircraft's major parts are shipped in from Italy, Japan and Kansas in one of Boeing's so-called Dreamlifters—modified 747s specially designed for carrying cumbersome equipment. And back in South Carolina, the back of the aircraft is built in an adjacent hangar next door.



Boeing builds its 787 Dreamliner planes at a hanger in South Carolina.



Boeing's 747 Dreamlifter is designed to carry bulky goods.

Betting on the 787 seems to have paid off so far: Boeing has received 250 orders for the plane just in the last six months.

"By the end of this year, it's almost guaranteed the 787 will be the most popular passenger wide-body in history," with even more total purchases than the 777 or Airbus A330, Boeing vice president of commercial marketing Darren Hulst predicted.

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Citation: At its 787 Dreamliner factory, Boeing prepares for takeoff (2023, June 2) retrieved 20

December 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-06-dreamliner-factory-boeing-takeoff.html>

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