Boeing Wraps Up 747-8 Testing

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Boeing painted the numbers "7-4-7" in the skies from Minnesota to California on the final test flight for its new jumbo jet.

A map on the flight-tracking service FlightAware shows that the plane left the airport in Everett, Washington, and flew over Montana, south to California, and back north working its way across North Dakota and Minnesota, with trips as far south as New Mexico and Oklahoma, to spell out "747."

The whole flight took 17 hours.

The flight on Tuesday wrapped up the testing for the new 747-8 freighter to be certified by the Federal Aviation Administration. To certify the plane, the FAA will go over data from more than 1,200 flights covering 3,400 hours since the first one flew on Feb. 8, 2010. Boeing is keeping two of the five test planes ready for additional flights if the FAA requests it.

Boeing spokesman Jim Proulx said the FAA shutdown is not expected to delay certification of the plane because the FAA people responsible for the certification have not been furloughed. He said the plane is expected to be certified within a few weeks. Boeing expects to deliver it to its first customer, Cargolux, in September.

Boeing's 747 has been flying for years as a freighter, but it is developing new, longer versions of the plane for both passenger and freight use. The new freighter version is 18 feet 4 inches longer than the 747-400 freighter, giving the new plane 16 percent more cargo space.

Boeing Co. test pilot Mark Feuerstein said on Wednesday that it will be an easy transition for current 747-400 pilots because the new 747-8 flies similarly to the older 747-400. Pilots who fly the 747-400 will only need three days of classroom training to be certified to fly the new plane, he said.

"Flying the airplane is just a dream," he said.

Boeing is still flight testing the passenger version, called the Intercontinental, and is aiming to deliver the first one by the end of the year.

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