

Airbus Announces Orders Of A320 Jet Family

Lori Hinnant, Associated Press

LE BOURGET, France (AP) — Airbus announced a series of orders for its smaller single-aisle jets Thursday, racking up 80 purchases for the A320 family of short- to medium-haul planes.

On its home turf, Airbus so far seems to have the edge over its rival Boeing at the Paris Air Show, which serves as a platform for the sales race between the giants.

The European plane-maker said Thursday that it has clocked about \$70 billion in sales at the show, but it also acknowledged that it has a problem with its large backlog, which will delay the delivery of jets.

The show is a rare venue where the plane makers go head to head, and each tends to inflate its sales figures — a common tactic is to notch up previously announced purchases that have been firmed up at the show. According to an Associated Press tally of new orders, Airbus' sales stand at \$54.8 billion. Boeing has not yet announced its own total, but the AP tally shows it has made \$18.8 billion in sales.

On Thursday, leasing company Hong Kong Aviation Capital agreed to buy 40 of Airbus' new generation A320 jets and 20 new generation A321s.

U.S.-based budget carrier Spirit Airlines, meanwhile, scooped up 20 of the current generation A321s and also converted 10 previous orders for A320s into A321s. Spirit's planes will all be fitted with add-ons to the wings that will increase fuel efficiency and feature a single-class layout to let the airline squeeze in more passengers.

The fuel efficiency of Airbus' smaller jets is one of their major selling points. At list prices, the Hong Kong Aviation Capital deal is worth \$6.3 billion, while Spirit's new orders are worth \$2.1 billion. Customers, however, typically negotiate steep discounts on orders.

Both the A320 and the A321 are on the smaller side; each seats about 180 passengers, though the A321 can be configured for up to 220.

Smaller jet purchases have made up the bulk of the orders this year as airlines renew their fleets or expand into new markets, notably in Asia and Latin America.

But the orders that have made the most impact are those of the brand-new Airbus A350, which made its very first flight just days before the Paris show opened. United Airlines agreed Thursday to buy 10 A350-1000s, the largest version of the new wide-body jet, which typically seats 350 passengers. The carrier also converted a previous order for 25 A350-900s into -1000s. The new orders are worth \$3.3 billion at list prices.

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The plane is still undergoing testing, but is expected to enter into service in the first half of next year. Because it has not yet logged enough flight hours, the jet is not on display at this week's show. But the company said it will do a fly-by on Friday over Le Bourget air field.

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