

TOP STORY

Boeing's 787-9 winning Dreamliner popularity contest as North Charleston prepares for first 787-10 flight

By David Wren
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Mar 2, 2017 (0)



Korean Air 787 (copy)

Boeing's 787-9 Dreamliner, like this one turned over last month in North Charleston to Korean Air Lines, is dominating orders and deliveries of the fuel-efficient wide-body plane. Brad Nettles/Staff

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Boeing Co.'s 787-9 continues to dominate deliveries of the aerospace giant's Dreamliner commercial planes, with the newer and longer model accounting for all but four of the 21 wide-bodies brought to customers so far this year, according to unofficial statistics.

The other four deliveries were for the older 787-8 models, which are quickly falling out of favor with airlines looking to beef up their long-distance routes with the fuel-efficient planes made of composite materials.

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"Boeing's Achilles heel is at the lowest end of the wide-body range ... the spot held by the 787-8," Air Insight, an aviation research firm, said in a [recent report](#). Air Insight adds that the 787-9 is grabbing great market share because "it provides a winning combination of range and payload."

That is borne out by this year's deliveries and the production schedule through 2018 at Dreamliner campuses in North Charleston and Everett, Wash., according to analyst Uresh Sheth's "[All Things 787](#)" website. While Boeing points out the website numbers are not official, Sheth has been consistently accurate.

Of the 17 "Dash 9" models delivered during the first two months of 2017, seven were assembled in North Charleston and 10 were made in Everett, according to "All Things 787." The Puget Sound campus assembled all four of the 787-8s delivered through February.

Looking into the future, Boeing has just 26 787-8s on its production schedule through 2018 compared with plans to build 210 787-9 models, according to Sheth. The newest and largest Dreamliner, the 787-10 built exclusively in North Charleston, has 15 slots on the production chart through the end of next year.

Boeing unveiled its first 787-10 last month during President Donald Trump's visit to the North Charleston plant. Sheth said the plane's initial flight should take place by March 10. The first delivery of a 787-10 won't occur until next year, with the first one going to Singapore Airlines.

Suppliers feeling Boeing's pay lag Aviation giant's new practice affecting cashflow, 2 firms say (copy) (copy)

Fuselage barrels for the 787 Dreamliner make their way through the assembly line at Boeing South Carolina. File

"We look forward to seeing the new 787-10 fly in the coming weeks — and complete the Dreamliner family when we deliver it to customers next year," Randy Tinseth, vice president of marketing at Boeing's commercial airplane division, said in a [recent post](#) on his "Randy's Journal" blog.

Even though the 787-10 is just starting production, its backlog of 149 orders already matches the 787-8's backlog. The 787-9 is clearly most popular with customers, with a backlog of 449 orders, according to Air Insight.

While the backlog remains strong — almost 750 Dreamliners in the production pipeline spread among 67 customers — some industry experts point to weakening demand for new wide-body planes because of low fuel prices as a potential trouble spot beyond 2019. Boeing says it will make a decision later this year on whether to boost Dreamliner production to 14 per month from 12, but analysts are [predicting a production cut](#) in the new decade.

"Some analysts have expressed concerns ... that the market for twin-aisle jets is over-saturated and demand for the Dreamliner is unlikely to remain robust as a result," Integer Investments, a London-based firm, said in a [report](#) Thursday.

Integer remains bullish on the Dreamliner, particularly since Boeing started turning a profit on each 787 sold beginning last year and is now chipping away at \$27 billion in production costs already spent on the program.

The Dreamliner "is likely to continue contributing to Boeing's profitability as costs fall further, generating positive net cash flow," the investment firm said.

Saj Ahmad, chief analyst for London-based Strategic Aero Research, said it is too early to write off the 787-8 despite its diminishing backlog and slowing sales.

"I think the focus on the 787-8's declining backlog is a bit of a false economy," he said. "It detracts from the reality that 350 of them will be in service by 2018. ... This doesn't include the potential options and purchase rights that airlines hold for the 787-8."

Ahmad said Airbus has no plane that competes with the 787-8 and, while it has a lower profit margin than its Dreamliner siblings, "it would cost Boeing almost nothing extra to make a 787-8, should an airline want it."

Any future 787-8s likely will be built in Everett, as the North Charleston campus focuses on integrating the 787-10 into production along with the 787-9. Sheth's production charts show Everett as the final assembly for all 26 of the 787-8s in the pipeline through 2018.

Reach **David Wren** at 843-937-5550 or on Twitter at @David_Wren_



Boeing buyouts

More than 1,800 Boeing workers have accepted voluntary buyouts announced in December and the aerospace giant has trimmed more than twice that amount from its workforce over the past three months, according to company statistics and a report by The Wall Street Journal.


The newspaper attributed its numbers to the International Association of Machinists, which represents Boeing production

workers on the West Coast. Workers at Boeing's North Charleston campus, which assembles the 787 Dreamliner, voted last month against IAM union representation.

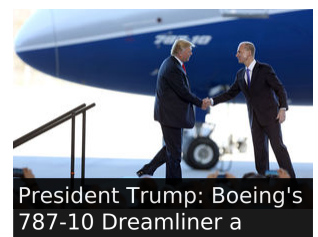
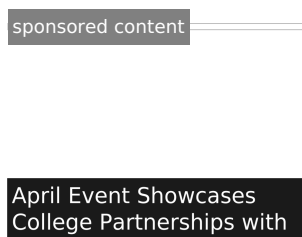
The North Charleston facilities have trimmed 135 jobs over the past three months, according to Boeing, which reported a local workforce of 7,572 as of Feb. 23. Globally, Boeing has 147,683 employees.

Boeing announced the buyouts as part of a cost-cutting plan to better compete with rival Airbus.

Tags **Boeing Co.** **787 Dreamliner** **North Charleston** **Aerospace** **787-8** **787-9** **787-10** **Everett, Wash.**

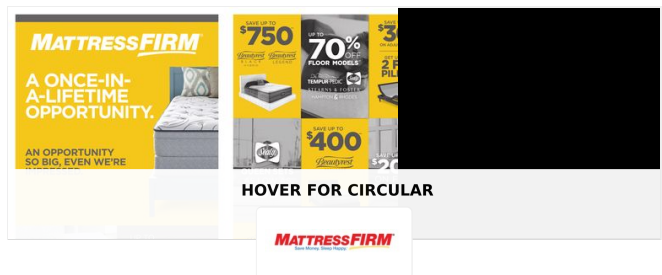
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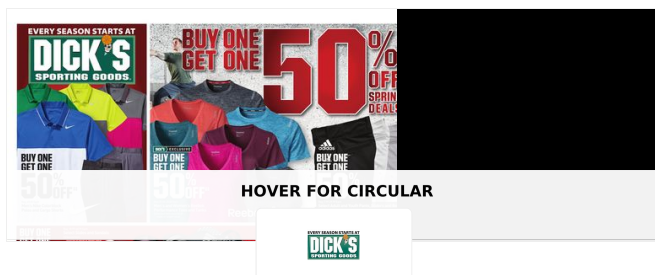
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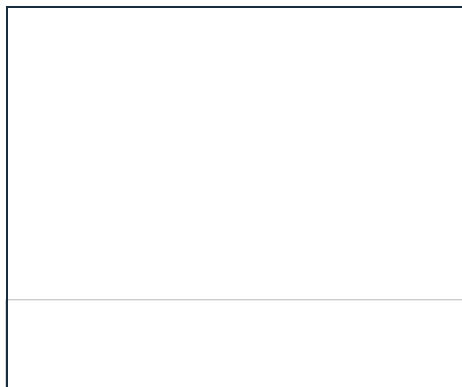


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