LATEST Airbus Lowers A320neo Production Targets

ANALYSIS

Boeing’s Widebody Blowout Reveals the Fault Lines in a Fragile Duopoly

Aviantics Labs
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Key Points:

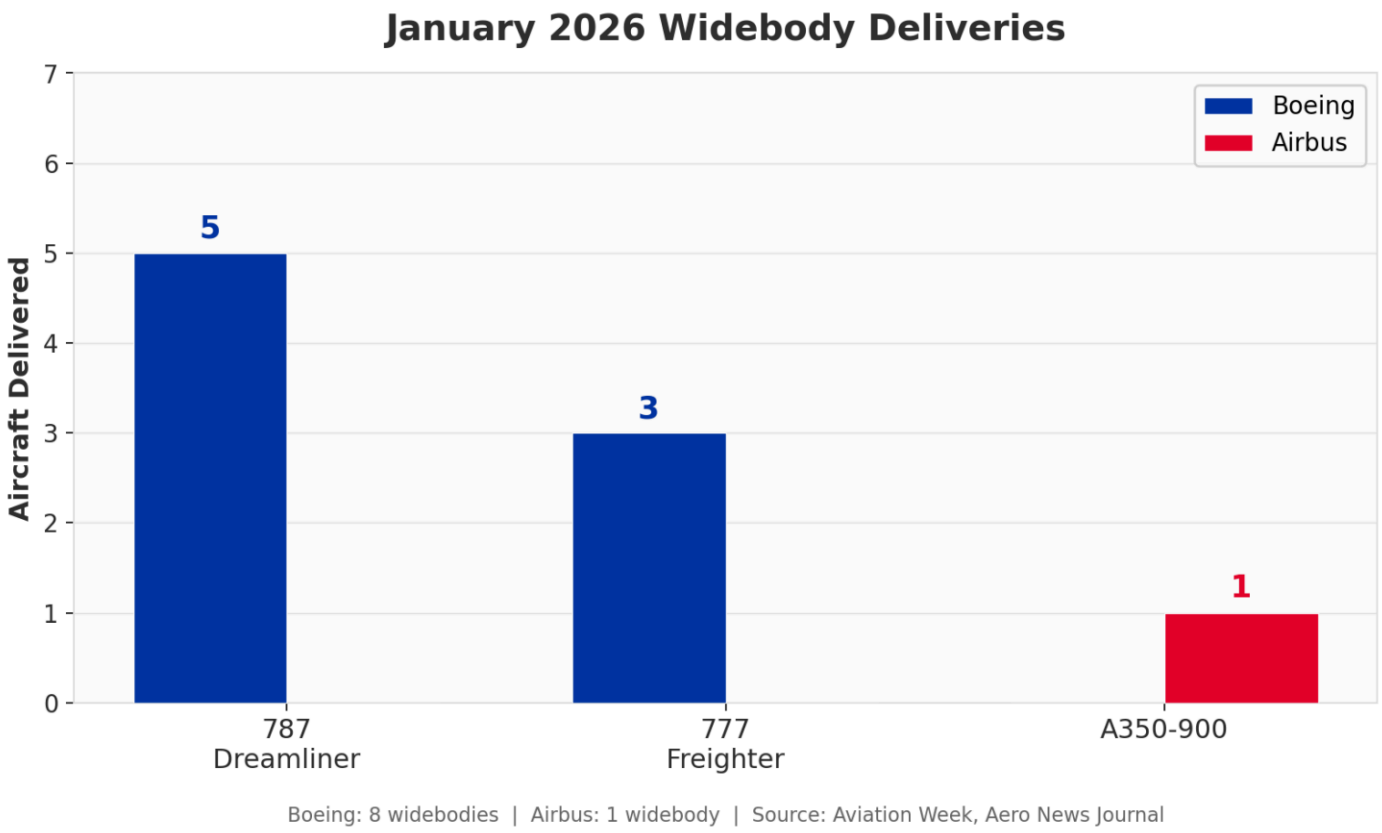
- ***Boeing delivered 8 widebodies in January 2026 (5× 787 + 3× 777F), while Airbus managed just 1 (a single A350-900)*** *— an 8-to-1 ratio that exposes divergent production trajectories between the two manufacturers.*
- ***Airbus recorded its weakest January since 2019****, handing over only 19 aircraft total, compared to Boeing's 46 — its best January since 2019. Lingering effects from the Sofitec fuselage panel quality crisis and the post-December delivery hangover weighed heavily.*
- ***Boeing's widebody backlog now exceeds Airbus' by over 740 aircraft*** *(1,869 vs 1,123), giving the American manufacturer a structural advantage in the twin-aisle segment as airlines race to secure long-haul capacity.*
- ***The A350 production paradox deepens****: Airbus logged 193 A350 orders in 2025 but averaged only 4.5 deliveries per month against a target of 6 — and has already abandoned its plan to reach 10 per month in 2026.*
- ***Cargo remains Boeing's unchallenged fortress****, with the 777F accounting for over 90% of global dedicated freighter capacity, while Airbus' competing A350F has slipped to a 2027 entry into service.*
- ***The supply chain, not the competition, is the real constraint****: engine shortages, seat certification delays, and single-source supplier dependencies mean that neither manufacturer can fully capitalize on the other's stumble.*

The January 2026 delivery scorecard is in, and the numbers are jarring. Boeing handed over eight widebody aircraft to customers — five 787 Dreamliners and three 777 Freighters — while Airbus managed exactly one: a solitary A350-900 destined for SWISS. An 8-to-1 widebody ratio between the world's two dominant airframers isn't just a statistical quirk. It's a snapshot of two manufacturers moving at very different speeds, for very different reasons, at a moment when airlines desperately need twin-aisle capacity.

But before anyone declares Boeing the undisputed winner of widebody season, it's worth pulling this story apart. Because the real narrative isn't about one month's delivery tally. It's about supply chain fragility, strategic production bets, and the uncomfortable truth that in a duopoly, one player's stumble doesn't automatically become the other's gain.

Airbus Had Its Worst January in a Decade — and It's Not Just a Seasonal Blip

Across all aircraft types, Airbus delivered just 19 jets in January to 15 customers. That's the European manufacturer's weakest January since at least 2019. For context, Airbus delivered 26 aircraft in January 2025 and 30 in January 2024. Going further back, the company managed 39 in January 2019, before the pandemic rewired the entire production ecosystem.



The contrast with December is almost absurd. Airbus pushed out a record 136 aircraft in December 2025, part of its annual year-end sprint to inflate the annual scoreboard. That kind of batching — delivering at nearly seven times the January pace in the preceding month — raises legitimate questions about whether the delivery rhythm is optimized for operational efficiency or for quarterly optics.

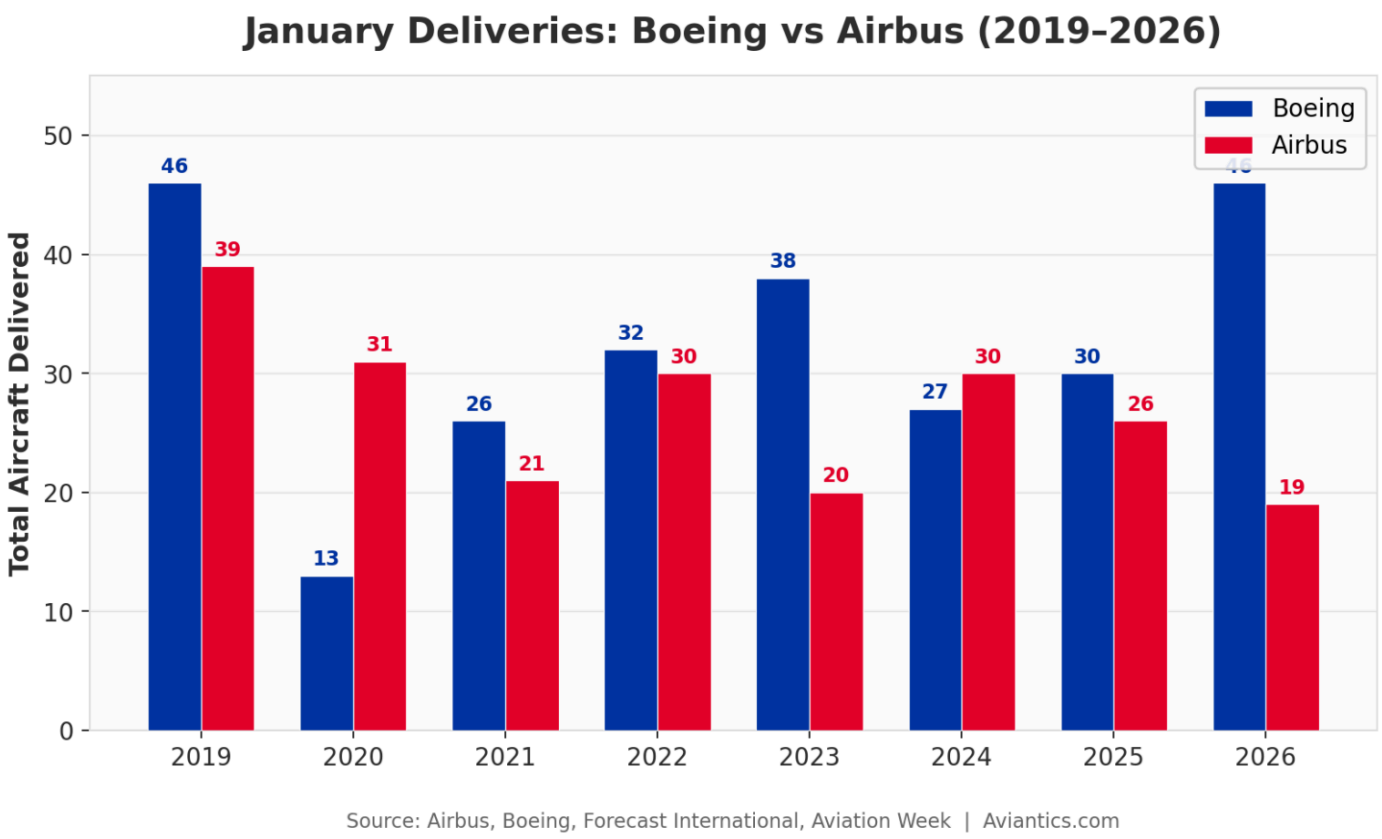
Aviation Week noted that the weak January figure may partly reflect lingering effects from a supplier quality problem that surfaced in late 2025. That issue involved fuselage panels manufactured by Spain-based Sofitec Aero, where machining deviations resulted in incorrect panel thickness on A320-family aircraft. The fallout was significant: 628 airframes needed inspection, including 168 already flying with airlines and over 240 still on assembly lines. Airbus ultimately slashed its 2025 delivery target from around 820 to 790, barely scraping through with 793.

Now, the Sofitec problem was technically an A320-family issue, not an A350 concern. But supply chain disruptions don’t respect program boundaries. When a manufacturer is scrambling to clear inspection backlogs and reorganize production flows, the ripple effects touch everything — from labor allocation to logistics coordination. A single widebody delivery in January suggests that Airbus’ industrial system was still recalibrating after the year-end push and the panel crisis hangover.

Boeing’s Widebody Portfolio Is Quietly Becoming Its Strongest Card

While the world has spent years fixated on the 737 MAX saga — the crashes, the grounding, the door plug blowout, the FAA production caps — Boeing’s widebody programs have been grinding ahead with remarkably little drama. The 787

Dreamliner, once plagued by its own quality control nightmares that halted deliveries for nearly two years, has st... into what might be Boeing's most reliable production line.



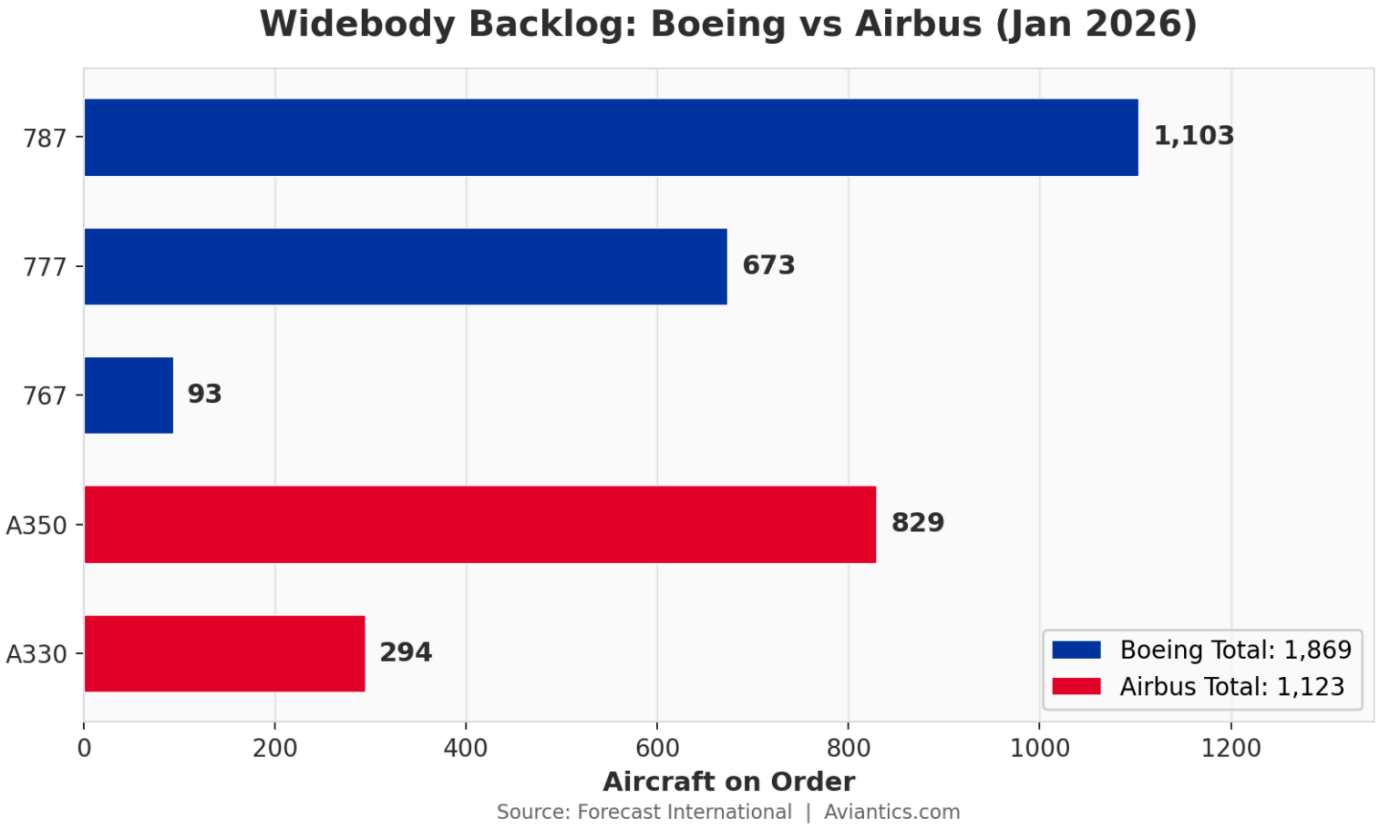
Five Dreamliner deliveries in January is consistent with a production rate that climbed from four to five per month in early 2025, then to seven, and was targeting eight by year-end. Boeing is also preparing to deliver enhanced variants of the 787-9 and 787-10 with increased maximum takeoff weight — adding roughly 400 nautical miles of range or six extra tons of cargo payload. The first higher-weight Dreamliners are already in the production system, with initial deliveries expected in the first half of 2026. It's an incremental move, but for airlines evaluating long-haul route economics, that extra range or payload flexibility can tip a business case. Boeing's CFO has indicated the company aims for 10 per month in 2026, a rate that would represent a doubling from just 18 months ago. A $1 billion expansion of the North Charleston, South Carolina facility — where ground was broken in November 2025 — is designed to support exactly this kind of ramp.

The three 777 Freighter deliveries are equally telling. These went to MSC Air Cargo, Turkish Airlines, and a third operator, reflecting robust demand in the cargo segment. MSC's delivery was notable as the first 777F handover of 2026, received during a ceremony at Boeing's Everett facility before departing for Milan. Turkish Cargo, meanwhile, is on track to expand its 777F fleet to 12 aircraft by mid-2026, adding roughly 220,000 tons of annual capacity as part of Turkish Airlines' ambitious 2033 Vision targeting an 813-aircraft fleet.

And the momentum keeps building. In January, Delta Air Lines finalized its first-ever direct order for 787 Dreamliners — up to 60 787-10s to support transatlantic and South American expansion, with deliveries stretching into the early 2030s. That kind of lead time tells you everything about where the widebody market sits right now: airlines are securing production slots a decade out because they can't afford to wait.

Here's what doesn't get enough attention: Boeing's widebody backlog is actually larger than Airbus'. At the end of January, Boeing held orders for approximately 1,103 787s, 673 777s, and 93 767s. Airbus, by comparison, had about 829 A350s and 294 A330s on its books. In a market where widebody demand is accelerating — driven by internation...

recovery, cargo growth, and fleet renewal cycles — that backlog advantage matters. It also means Boeing has m… revenue locked in on the twin-aisle side, providing a financial cushion as it continues investing in production recovery and rate increases.



The A350 Production Paradox: Big Orders, Slow Assembly

On paper, the A350 should be enjoying a golden era. Airbus logged 193 A350 orders in 2025, including blockbuster campaigns with airlines like Etihad, Air Canada, and Philippine Airlines. The A350-1000 has attracted renewed interest, and Airbus has been publicly exploring a stretched variant — the so-called A350-2000 — aimed at competing with Boeing's 777X family. Turkish Airlines alone holds 110 A350s on order, making it the type's largest customer.

But orders and production are two very different things. Throughout 2025, A350 output averaged just four and a half aircraft per month against a target of six. That's not a ramp-up trajectory; that's a program struggling to hit its baseline. Forecast International reported that through October 2025, only 40 A350s had been delivered — roughly four per month — despite the official target being 50% higher.

Airbus had previously announced plans to reach 10 A350s per month by 2026 and 12 by 2028. By the third quarter of 2025, reality had forced a recalibration. The company revised its longer-term target to 12 per month while effectively acknowledging that the near-term push to 10 was no longer realistic. Spirit AeroSystems, which supplies the A350's center fuselage section, has been a particular bottleneck — the same Spirit that Boeing simultaneously acquired in December 2025, adding another layer of complexity to an already tangled supplier relationship.

So when Airbus delivers just one A350 in an entire month, it's not merely a seasonal dip. It's a symptom of a widebody production system that hasn't yet found its rhythm, even as the order book swells. And this comes on top of the broader "glider" problem — partially completed A320-family airframes sitting on the tarmac waiting for engines or components. Airbus officials reported that the number of engineless gliders declined from a peak of around 60 in 2025 to a "manageable" figure, but the fact that the term exists at all speaks to the depth of the supply chain dysfunction.

The Shared Supply Chain Trap

There's a tempting narrative here: Boeing is up, Airbus is down, therefore Boeing wins. But the duopoly doesn't work that neatly. Both manufacturers draw from an overlapping web of suppliers, engine makers, and raw material providers. When one side stumbles, the stress doesn't just stay contained.

Consider the engine picture. Pratt & Whitney's GTF engines continue to plague the A320neo fleet, with roughly a quarter of the global PW1500G-powered A220 fleet grounded for inspection or repair at various points. On the 787 side, Boeing is increasingly tilting toward GE Aerospace's GEnx powerplant. Air China's latest 787-9 order specified GEnx engines — a defection from Rolls-Royce that joins a growing list of operators abandoning the Trent 1000. Industry observers at Airliners.net noted that Rolls-Royce's remaining 787 engine customers are shrinking to a handful: Lufthansa, Singapore Airlines, and El Al among the last holdouts.

Engine availability remains the single biggest constraint on production rates for both manufacturers. Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg specifically called out seat-certification delays as the chokepoint for getting the 787 from eight to 10 per month. Cabin interiors — seats, galleys, lavatories — are another recurring headache across both OEMs. These aren't glamorous supply chain stories, but they're the ones that determine whether aircraft actually reach customers.

The Sofitec episode at Airbus and Spirit AeroSystems' troubled production at multiple programs illustrate a deeper structural problem. The aerospace supply chain was stretched thin even before the pandemic. Years of consolidation, lean-inventory philosophies, and single-source dependencies have created a system where a machining error at one factory in southern Spain can force a global manufacturer to cut its annual delivery guidance by 30 aircraft.

Cargo Is Quietly Reshaping the Widebody Market

Three of Boeing's eight widebody deliveries in January were freighters, and that's not a coincidence. The dedicated freighter market has been one of aviation's strongest segments since the pandemic-era e-commerce boom, and Boeing dominates it in a way that Airbus can only envy.

Boeing's 777 Freighter accounts for more than 265 deliveries to date, making it the best-selling production freighter in history. The company claims over 90% of worldwide dedicated freighter capacity when including both new-build and conversion programs. MSC Air Cargo — the shipping giant's aviation arm — is building a fleet around the 777F, while Turkish Cargo's expansion plans are entirely Boeing-centric.

Airbus is trying to change this dynamic with the A350F, a clean-sheet freighter variant of the A350-1000. But the program has slipped. Entry into service, originally planned for 2026, has been pushed to the second half of 2027, and launch customer Air Lease Corporation actually cancelled its order in August 2025. CMA CGM Air Cargo has since claimed the launch operator role, but the A350F won't contribute to Airbus' widebody delivery numbers for some time.

Meanwhile, Boeing is also developing the 777-8F as a next-generation replacement, though that aircraft isn't expected to enter service until later in the decade. The current 777F production line is expected to wind down through 2026,

a transition gap that Boeing will need to manage carefully. For now, though, the freighter segment is pure Boeing territory, and every 777F delivery in January underscored that advantage.

What January Really Tells Us About 2026

One month does not make a trend, and both manufacturers know that January is typically the weakest delivery period of the year as production systems reset after the December rush. Boeing's 46 total deliveries (its best January since 2019) versus Airbus' 19 (its worst in a decade) is striking, but extrapolating this gap across the full year would be misleading.

Airbus' backlog of 8,777 aircraft at the end of January — roughly 9.7 years of production at projected rates — isn't going anywhere. The company's widebody programs will recover. The A350's production challenges are solvable, and Airbus has demonstrated before that it can accelerate output when the industrial pieces fall into place.

Boeing, for its part, still faces enormous hurdles of its own. The 777X certification has slipped yet again, with entry into service now pushed to 2027 — seven years behind the original schedule. The MAX 7 and MAX 10 remain uncertified. And while 787 production is ramping nicely, the jump from eight to 10 per month is, by Ortberg's own admission, going to be significantly more challenging than anything Boeing has done recently.

The more interesting question isn't who "won" January. It's whether the aerospace industry's industrial base can support the combined ramp-up that both manufacturers are attempting simultaneously. Airbus is targeting roughly 900-plus deliveries in 2026. Boeing is aiming for something north of 680. AirInsight projects combined deliveries of 1,044 for Airbus and 708 for Boeing. That's over 1,750 aircraft from two companies sharing many of the same tier-one and tier-two suppliers.

Can the supply chain handle it? The January data suggests that the answer, at least right now, is: not smoothly. Airbus' anemic start points to a system still recovering from 2025's disruptions. Boeing's stronger showing reflects better widebody momentum, but the real test comes when both manufacturers are simultaneously pushing hard on narrowbody and widebody rates through the second half of the year.

The Uncomfortable Truth About Aviation's Duopoly

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the January numbers isn't the gap between Boeing and Airbus — it's what that gap tells us about the fragility of a market served by only two major players. When Airbus delivers one widebody in a month, airlines waiting for A350s don't have a realistic backup option. Boeing's 787 backlog stretches nearly a decade. There's no quick pivot.

This is the structural reality that January 2026 makes uncomfortably visible. The aviation industry needs both manufacturers operating at full capacity just to meet existing demand, let alone the growth trajectory that post-pandemic traffic recovery and fleet modernization are driving. Every month that one OEM underperforms widens the fleet age problem, extends lease rates for aging aircraft, and forces airlines to defer route launches or capacity additions they've already promised to investors.

Boeing's eight-to-one widebody advantage in January is a headline. But the real story is an industry where demand has decisively outrun the ability to build, and where a quality escape at a single Spanish machining shop or a seat certification bottleneck in South Carolina can ripple across the global fleet plans of airlines on five continents. Neither manufacturer can afford to take comfort in the other's stumble — because in this duopoly, the supply chain doesn't pick favorites.

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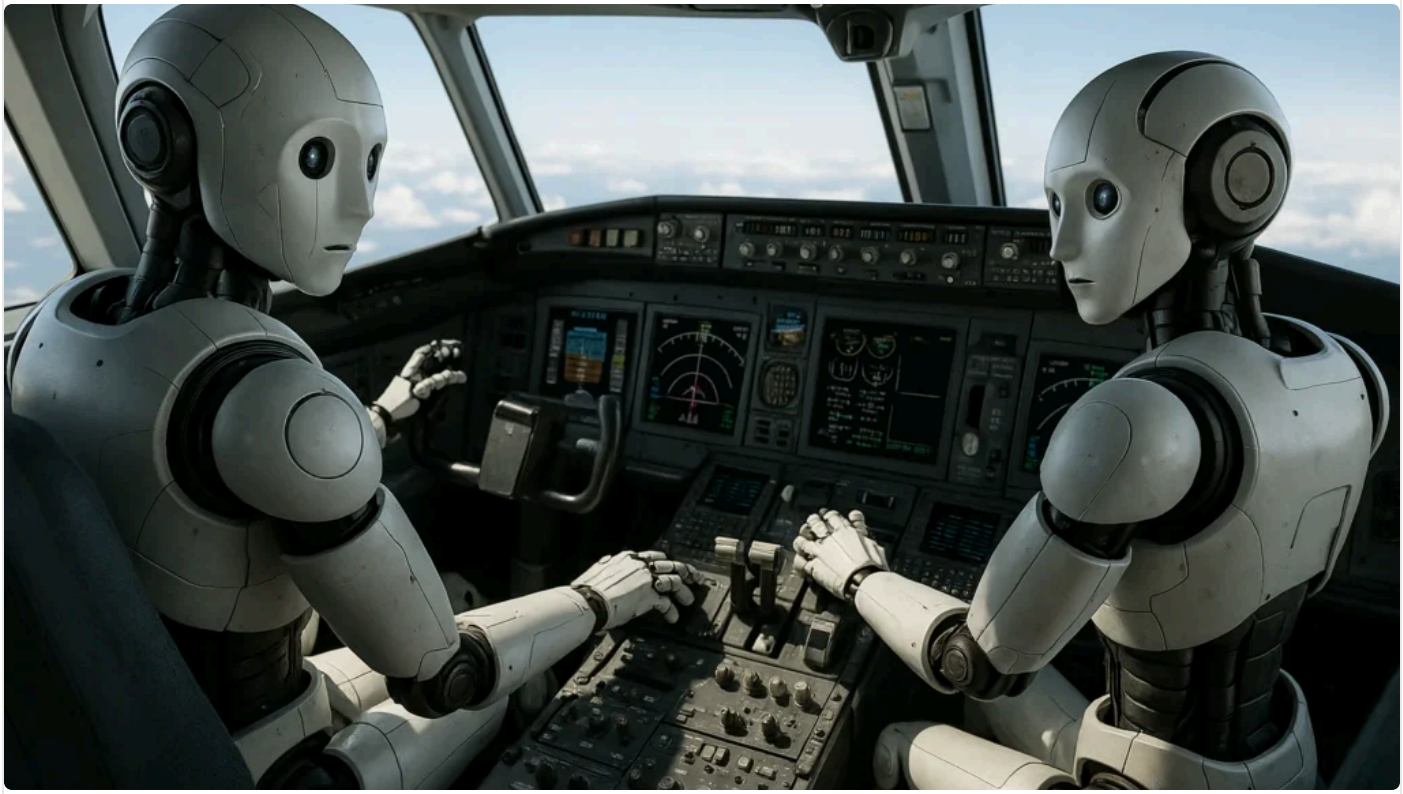

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