

BECAUSE OF A DISPUTE WITH ROLLS-ROYCE

Is United going to shoot down the Airbus



United Airlines was one of the early A350 customers – and has been struggling with the aircraft for almost 17 years. The Lufthansa partner had planned to make a "final decision" regarding the A350 by the end of 2025 at the latest. Instead, United is now embroiled in a legal dispute with Rolls-Royce.

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Photo: Patrick Zwenger

United Airlines' A350 order is hanging by a thread. The airline has informed its shareholders about a legal dispute with Rolls-Royce over A350 engines.

In 2009, the US industry giant initially ordered 25 A350-900s from Airbus to replace its 747-400s. Four years later, the airline changed the order to 35 A350-1000s. In 2017, United finally increased the order by another ten to 45 aircraft, but switched back to the A350-900.

United has yet to receive any A350s. However, with the last order modification in 2017, United made a down payment of US\$175 million to Rolls-Royce for engines. The airline considers Rolls-Royce to be in "breach of contract" and filed a claim for reimbursement in December 2025, United explained in a recent mandatory disclosure.

United further stated that Rolls-Royce had not made any payments, had "terminated the relevant contract with United" and was accusing the airline of breaching its contract.

Rolls-Royce has largely confirmed the matter to US media. "We are aware of the incident and are confident in our position," a spokesperson told AirInsight.

United plans to operate without the A350-900 for the time being.

United CEO Scott Kirby had internally announced in September 2025 that a "final decision" regarding the A350-900, a potential replacement for the Boeing 777-200ER sub-fleet, would be made by the end of the year. At that time, relations between United and Rolls-Royce were still good – Kirby said Rolls-Royce had offered United favorable terms for the engines.

United Airlines had recently considered building an A350 fleet starting in 2027 – in its mandatory disclosure, United has removed the A350 from its delivery schedule for subsequent years.

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