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A350 order on the verge of collapse?

3 days ago

United Airlines falls out with Rolls-Royce

CHICAGO – 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" on the A350 by the end of 2025 at the latest. Instead, United is now embroiled in a legal dispute with Rolls-Royce.



Airbus A350-900, © Airbus

United Airlines' A350 order hangs 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 aircraft but switched back to the A350-900.

With the last order modification in 2017, United made a down payment of \$175 million for engines from Rolls-Royce. 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.

Rolls-Royce has not made any payments, "terminated the relevant contract with United," and is, in turn, accusing the airline of breach of contract, United continued.

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

United is currently planning without the A350-900.

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 – Rolls-Royce had offered United favorable terms for the engines, Kirby said.

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

© aero.de | Fig.: United Airlines | 02/16/2026 08:26

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Post from February 16, 2026 - 8:49 PM

EricM

https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/united-stalled-a350-order-thrown-into-doubt-by-rolls-royce-engine-row-2026-02-13/

Reuters also provides just as little information. It seems there's nothing more than a mandatory stock exchange announcement and a "no comment" from both parties.

But when you consider that these are orders from 2009, which, 17 years later, aren't even scheduled for production, you have to wonder what practical relevance this has for Rolls-Royce or United Airlines (or Airbus)...

This order is less "stalled" than "stalled many years ago, crashed, and, except for a few very solid parts, completely corroded away"...

This post was edited on 16.02.2026 at 20:53.

Post from February 16, 2026 - 6:45 PM

olfrygt

As far as I know, and this has been reported several times, the US airlines in particular have committed to indirectly boycotting Airbus.

Um, yeah... If that's true (source?), then it's a pretty ridiculous boycott, with each of the three old, large US airlines currently waiting for 140 to 250 (!) Airbus aircraft.

Post from February 16, 2026 - 12:58 PM

Jochen Hansen

As far as I know, and this has been reported several times, the US airlines in particular have committed to indirectly boycotting Airbus (see the A380 issue, the effects of which are still being felt today). Aside from that, United has its large Boeing fleet, and it was already strange that an airline that relied almost exclusively on Boeing suddenly ordered 45 A350s, knowing that Rolls-Royce doesn't supply the engines. Apparently, United's management didn't quite understand how things work when you're bold enough to order 45 aircraft, or—and this is what I suspect—they were aware of the situation in order to then cancel the order for maximum publicity because "they had a falling out with Rolls-Royce." We all know that US airlines prefer to have Pratt & Whitney engines in their aircraft, even though they have massive difficulties maintaining them properly (see the major problems with all A220/A320 aircraft using these engines).

But why would US airlines boycott Airbus, aside from the "buy American" sentiment? Delta, in particular, has a significant Airbus presence in its fleet.

So what options does UA have now? Wait for the 777-9? Generally speaking, the pain will be felt less by Airbus than by UA, considering the age of their 777 subfleet and the A350's stellar sales.

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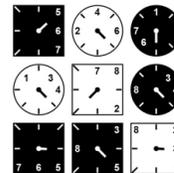
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