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Boeing vs Airbus 2026: The Scorecard Nobody Expected

by Connor Kerr | Apr 15, 2026 | Aviation World | 0 comments

Every year, it is the same question. Boeing or Airbus – who is winning? And every year, the answer is more complicated than either company would like to admit. But three and a half months into 2026, there is enough data on the board to draw a picture. It is a picture that would have been unthinkable two years ago. Boeing is delivering more aircraft than Airbus. Let that sentence sit for a moment. After years of 737 MAX groundings, factory slowdowns, quality scandals, and congressional investigations, Boeing shipped an estimated 142 commercial aircraft in the first quarter of 2026. Airbus managed 108. For the first time since the MAX crisis began, Boeing is outpacing its rival on the metric that pays the bills. But if you think that means Boeing is “winning,” you have not been paying attention to how this rivalry actually works.

Q1 2026 Scorecard

	Boeing	Airbus
Q1 Deliveries (est.)	142	108
January Deliveries	46	19
February Deliveries	51	35
March Deliveries (est.)	45	54
Total Backlog	~6,734	~7,649

Boeing's Quiet Surge

The numbers tell a story of recovery. Boeing's January was its strongest opening month in years – 46 deliveries, more than double Airbus's 19. February continued the momentum with 51 aircraft out the door. The MAX production line, which spent much of 2024 and 2025 operating under FAA-imposed rate caps, has been steadily climbing toward the company's target of 38 per month. The 737 MAX is the engine of this surge. After years in which the aircraft was synonymous with crisis, the MAX is now the world's best-selling narrowbody – not because airlines have forgotten what happened, but because they need the aircraft and there is no alternative at scale. The A320neo family has a backlog stretching past 2030 for new orders; airlines that need jets now are going to Boeing. Boeing's widebody deliveries have also stabilised. The 787 Dreamliner, which spent months in a delivery freeze over quality issues with fuselage shimming, is shipping again. The 777X, long delayed, is in its final stages of certification. If Boeing can get the 777X into airline service in 2026, it will re-enter the widebody market with the only new-design twin-aisle in production.

Airbus A321neo first flight

An Airbus A321neo during its first flight. The A320neo family dominates the global narrowbody backlog with over 7,000 aircraft on order, but Airbus has struggled with deliveries in early 2026. Wikimedia Commons.

Airbus's Assembly Problem

Airbus is not losing the race because airlines stopped ordering its aircraft. The Toulouse-based manufacturer's backlog stands at approximately 7,649 aircraft – nearly a thousand more than Boeing's. The A320neo family alone accounts for over 7,100 unfilled orders, a wall of demand that would take a decade to clear at current production rates. The problem is in the factory, not the showroom. Airbus produced 141 aircraft through mid-March but delivered only 94. That gap – 47 aircraft built but not handed to customers – points to a persistent bottleneck in cabin installation, systems testing, and final delivery that has plagued Airbus since the ramp-up accelerated in late 2025. Fuselage panel quality issues with the A320neo have not helped. Supply chain disruptions in early 2026 forced Airbus to delay completions on multiple lines. January's 19 deliveries were a particularly painful result for a company that set a target of delivering 800 aircraft in 2025 and appears to be starting 2026 behind schedule.

The Bigger Picture

Deliveries measure what is happening now. Orders measure what will happen in five to ten years. And on that longer horizon, Airbus still holds the structural advantage. Its narrowbody backlog is larger, its A321XLR is opening new transatlantic routes that the 737 MAX cannot serve, and its A350 is the dominant widebody in new orders. Boeing's strength is cyclical. Airlines that needed aircraft immediately – replacing ageing fleets, covering pandemic-era deferrals – went to Boeing because Boeing had delivery slots available. Airbus did not. That dynamic could reverse the moment Airbus resolves its factory throughput issues and begins clearing its production backlog at higher rates. But here is the number that matters most: Boeing led Airbus in orders in January 2026. That had not happened since 2018. Whether it lasts a single month or marks the beginning of a genuine competitive shift will depend on whether Boeing can sustain production quality while scaling the MAX line and whether the 777X enters service on time. For now, the score is closer than anyone expected. And in a rivalry this

old and this fierce, that is the story. *Sources: Forecast International Flight Plan, ePlaneAI, AirInsight, Leeham News, Avgeekery*

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