OMAN AIR TO OPEN TALKS PITTING AIRBUS A350 AGAINST BOEING 787

News / Airlines



Oman Air said it’s poised to begin talks with Boeing Co and Airbus Group SE over an order for the latest generation of wide-body jets to replace 12 older A330 planes.

The Gulf carrier will open negotiations in coming weeks, with the focus on Airbus’s A350-900 model and the 787-9 or -10 from its US rival, Chief Executive Officer Paul Gregorowitsch said at a briefing in London.

While standardising around the Boeing Dreamliner, of which Oman Air is already set to have 13 in its fleet from an earlier deal, would appear to make sense, the A350 might have the edge on the longest routes to destinations such as South Africa, Gregorowitsch said Wednesday.

The re-engined Neo version of the A330 is out of the running, with all-new aircraft are preferable to a “facelift plane,” unless Airbus presents a particularly compelling case for the legacy model, the

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CEO said.

Oman Air has already sourced two 787-8s from Kenya Airways on three-year lease terms as part of deal to purchase landing slots at London Heathrow airport from the African carrier and Air France, adding to the two Dreamliners already in its fleet.

Earnings goal

Gregorowitsch, who spoke after the start of a second daily Heathrow service using the new slots, said that Oman Air is aiming to make a profit at an operating level by the end of 2017, with its state owner's funding contribution due to drop to 34 million Omani riyals (Dh324 million, $88 million) this year from 64 million in 2015.

The company is currently negotiating with two airlines in Europe and one in Asia as it seeks a joint venture partner with which to operate flights as an alternative to joining a global airline alliance, the CEO said.

Talks are also under way on a possible code-share arrangement with Deutsche Lufthansa AG, adding to arrangements it already has with carriers including Turkish Airlines.

Plans to add a first route to China this summer are on hold as Oman Air seeks optimum operating slots, though should start next winter, Gregorowitsch said.

Under a plan developed by consultants Seabury, Oman aims to build a fleet of 70 planes, 25 of them wide-bodies plus 45 Boeing 737 single-aisle jets. The strategy specifies new long-haul routes including Madrid, Brussels, Rome and Moscow in Europe plus cities in Asia and Africa, the CEO said, adding that the carrier won't directly serve the US.

16 APRIL 2016

SOURCE: GULFNEWS
ARTICLE LINK:
https://ut.50skyshades.com/news/airlines/oman-air-to-open-talks-pitting-airbus-a350-against-boeing-787

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