A350-1000 TO ENTER FINAL ASSEMBLY NEXT MONTH

News / Manufacturer



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Airbus is expecting the first A350-1000 to enter the final assembly line in February, with first flight set to take place by the end of this year.

The aircraft is at the pre-final assembly stage and chief operating officer Tom Williams says its development is progressing relatively smoothly.

“It’s coming together really well, probably better than the -900,” he told Flightglobal during a briefing in Paris on 12 January.

Williams says the work on the -1000 has benefited substantially from the design experience of the -900, although he points out that the larger aircraft has encountered “a few hiccups”.

These include snags in the wing development as a result of the supply chain. While Williams

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declines to elaborate, he stresses that the issue was not design-related but largely centred on provision of brackets and similar components.

“We seem to have worked through [these problems],” he says.

Airbus chief executive Fabrice Bregier says the airframer is aiming to have the initial aircraft – powered by Rolls-Royce Trent XWB-97 engines – in final assembly during February.

He adds that the first flight of the aircraft will be conducted in the fourth quarter.

Airbus had secured orders for 181 A350-1000s by the end of last year.

While the airframer has been looking at the potential for a larger version of the -1000, chief operating officer for customers John Leahy says the case has yet to become clear – even though Boeing’s 777-9 will have some 35 more seats than the -1000.

“The jury is still out as to whether the market is asking for more seats in this category, which is why we haven’t rushed into the marketplace just yet with [an A350] stretch beyond where we are today,” he says.

Leahy says the -1000 has “economics that work very, very well”, adding that the type will be an “unbeatable airplane”.

15 JANUARY 2016

SOURCE: FLIGHTGLOBAL
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