AIRBUS TARGETS FARNBOROUGH SHOW FOR UPDATE ON BIGGER A350-1000

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Airbus Group SE plans to offer airlines an update by the Farnborough Air Show in July on its potential plans to come out with a bigger variant of the A350 wide-body jetliner so it can better challenge the order success of Boeing Co.'s enlarged 777X.

The aircraft, a longer version of the A350-1000 --itself already a so-called stretch model --would be offer more seats in three-class configuration than Boeing Co.'s 777-9, Airbus's chief salesman John Leahy said in an interview at the Singapore Airshow.

Airbus's A350-900, introduced in 2014, typically seats 325, with the -1000, due to commence deliveries in 2017, offering 366 berths. While that's sufficient to combat existing 777 variants and the upgraded 777-8, the Airbus doesn't currently have a twin-aisle model to offer the capacity of Boeing's 777-9, a maximum of 425 people.

Airbus is studying whether there is a big enough market at 30 to 40 seats larger than the current A350-1000, Leahy said.

"We're starting to conclude that perhaps there is such a market and now we're talking to key airlines about what we might be able to do in that market but no final decision has been made,"

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Leahy said. “We’ll certainly be able to give you an update at Farnborough.”

Leahy said the new variant would have more seats than the 425 seats maximum capacity of the Boeing 777-9.

A380 customer

Jumbo-sized twin-engine wide-bodies have become a focus for Airbus and Boeing as airlines move away from less fuel-efficient four-engine models. Leahy said that the Rolls-Royce Plc engines now offered for the A350-1000 would be sufficient to power a larger variant, though would likely need some thrust added.

“There will not be a brand new engine," Leahy said. "We might increase the thrust of it, but it will be the same engine technology if we were to do the airplane. We study a lot of things of which some end up in the market and some
don’t."

Airbus also offers a much larger plane than the twin-aisle, twin-jet A350, the superjumbo A380. The planemaker had struggled to win any airline customers for three years, yet recently won an order for three planes from All Nippon. Earlier this year Iran said it intended to place an order for 12 planes.

Leahy today said he’s got at least one potential Asian customer lined up to buy a minimum of five planes. He declined to disclose any names, though said the customer has met with him at the Singapore show this week.

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