EMIRATES GIVES UP ON UPGRADED AIRBUS A380

News / Airlines, Manufacturer

Emirates, the largest operator of Airbus's A380 superjumbo, has all but given up on getting an upgrade of the double-decker with new engines and is instead making a more modest pitch to the planemaker: please don't drop the programme altogether.

"I can't force Toulouse to do anything," Emirates president Tim Clark told reporters at a briefing in Dublin, referring to Airbus's home base in southern France. "My main concern is that they stop producing the plane."

Mr Clark has become a marketing champion for the world's largest passenger plane, deploying the jetliner on both major trunk routes like Heathrow-Dubai as well as secondary airports like Manchester or Barcelona. While new engines would further enhance the model by providing greater flexibility with more range and higher takeoff weight, Mr Clark conceded that talks with the manufacturer regarding an upgrade had "kind of lapsed." Emirates is by far the largest customer for the aircraft, having ordered 142 in total.

Emirates' concern about Airbus keeping the plane on the production line is driven by the fact that few sizeable buyers exist besides the Gulf operator. Airlines including Air France-KLM and Deutsche Lufthansa have actually trimmed their orders, and most customers have bought the

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airliner in relatively small numbers. Airbus itself says the production line has gaps from 2018. A total of 319 A380s have been ordered, fewer than the annual output of the best-selling A320 line of smaller planes.

Airbus, after rushing 18 months ago to assure the airline community that it would look seriously at an A380Neo, has made increasingly clear that any such project is something for the long term. The emphasis for now is finding ways to improve the plane and carve out more space with simpler moves to better organise space on the plane.

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