EMIRATES STEPS UP A380NEO CAMPAIGN WITH 20-YEAR UTILIZATION PLAN

News / Airlines

Emirates, the biggest customer for Airbus Group SE' A380 superjumbo, said it has presented the manufacturer with a 20-year operating program for the aircraft, stepping up its campaign for a re-engined version of a model that's struggling for orders elsewhere.

"We had several meetings with Airbus this year on the A380neo, on what we want and how many, right up until 2035," Emirates President Tim Clark told reporters Monday at an aviation conference in Dubai.

While Emirates has 140 A380s on order and is interested in at least 100 more worth US$43 billion, it's struggling to convince Airbus of the merits of upgrading a plane that last won a new airline customer in 2012. The manufacturer is struggling even to deliver ordered jets, with Skymark Airlines Inc., which wanted six, suffering financial meltdown, Transaero Airlines, buying four, on the verge of collapse, and Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd. unsure if it needs six.

Two-Class A380

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Emirates will take 21 superjumbos next year, according to Clark, and has specified 15 high capacity two-class variants which "will go on routes that can take it, of which there are many," he said. Also arriving in 2016 will be 15 Boeing Co. 777-300ERs, of which it is also the world's biggest operator.

Clark said Sunday that Emirates is still studying the Airbus A350 and rival 787 from Boeing and won't make a decision on a potential order before next year, ruling out the possibility of an announcement at next month's Dubai air show.

During the last Dubai show Emirates placed a top-up order for 50 A380s, plus 150 upgraded Boeing 777Xs. The 777-8X in particular will bring into play some markets still beyond reach, such as parts of Latin America, Clark said.

Leases on existing jets could be extended until the 777X arrives, he said, with long-range 777-200LR variants getting a life-extending upgrade beyond one underway that will keep them flying for an extra three to five years.

Demand on routes to Australia, where Emirates has a venture with Qantas Airways Ltd., is buoyant, Clark said, revealing that he met counterpart Alan Joyce last week to map out three-to-five-year capacity needs. That might see Qantas reactivate direct European routes using 787-9s.

Dubai International airport will become the world's busiest within three years, overtaking Beijing and Atlanta, Dubai Airports Chief Executive Officer Paul Griffiths predicted at the conference. It will reach 100 million passengers a year before the new Al Maktoum airport is ready, and may hit capacity limits.

In 2020, once Emirates has moved to Al Maktoum, the airports will swap roles, with the new site becoming a mega-hub for transfers and Dubai International catering to passengers who begin or end their journey in Dubai, he said.

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