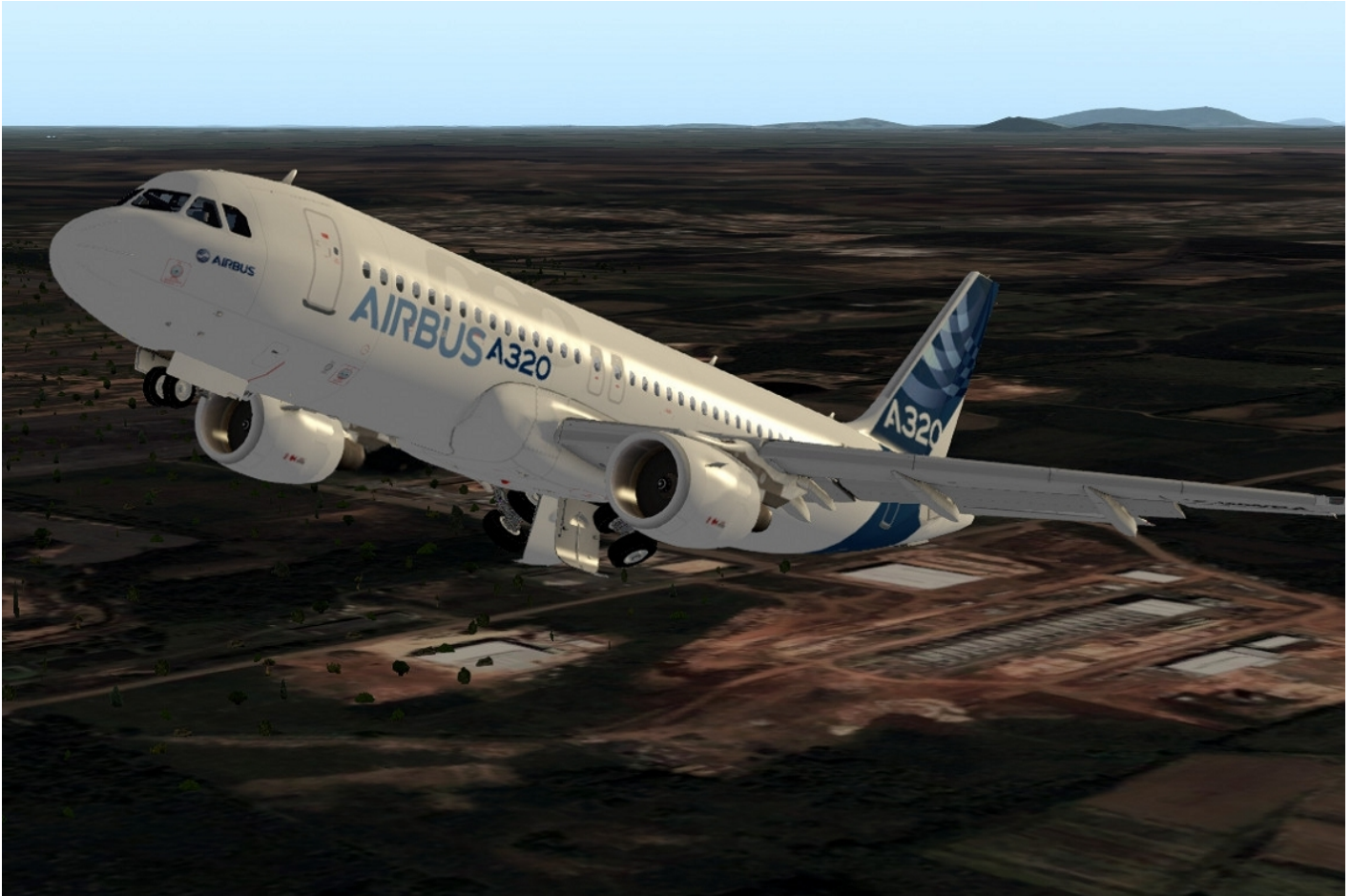




LUFTHANSA, NOT QATAR, TO BE AIRBUS A320NEO LAUNCH OPERATOR

News / Manufacturer



Airbus is making a last-minute swap and now plans to deliver the first Airbus A320neo to Lufthansa, not to Qatar Airways.

According to industry sources, the change was made because of operational restrictions that are still in place for the Pratt & Whitney PW1100G engine, pending some hardware and software changes. Pratt is working on hardware changes to the bearing of the engine shaft and a software update. Until those changes are made, the engine has to run in idle for 3 min. following startup. The aircraft cannot taxi under its own power until the 3 min. have elapsed.

According to the sources, Qatar Airways has told Airbus that it is not prepared to take the aircraft under these circumstances, and will not do so until the restrictions are lifted. Changes are expected to be implemented within a matter of weeks.

Lufthansa Group CEO Carsten Spohr confirmed to ATW's sister publication Aviation Daily that his airline has agreed, in principle, to take the first A320neo. Some regulatory issues have to be sorted out and the airline expects to be financially compensated for the operational restrictions that

are in place for now. The negotiations could, therefore, still fail. However, if the two sides come to an agreement, the first A320neo is now expected to be delivered to Lufthansa from Hamburg-Finkenwerder on Dec. 22, which would enable Airbus to stick to its target of delivering the first aircraft before the end of the year.

Lufthansa plans to introduce the first A320neo into revenue service on Jan. 6. Because of the limitations to the engine it plans to deploy it on the Frankfurt-Hamburg route initially - it has large maintenance bases on both ends of it. The airline plans to take five A320neos in 2016.

Qatar Airways is now planned to become the second A320neo operator, followed by Indian low-cost carrier Indigo.

Lufthansa has ordered 101 A320neo-family aircraft. Qatar Airways has ordered a combined 50 A320neos and A321neos. Indigo is the largest single customer for the aircraft, with orders for 430 aircraft.

While Pratt & Whitney did not address the specific engine issues directly, it says both it and Airbus "are working very closely with Qatar Airways. We are excited that Qatar selected the Geared Turbofan engine to power their A320neo aircraft and we appreciate their business. Along with Airbus, we are continuing to work with early customers on the first delivery of the aircraft. The team is on track to deliver the first A320neo this year."

The engine-maker adds that "our engines and the aircraft are certified and are ready for delivery to customers this year. Our GTF engine's technology is meeting or exceeding performance requirements on fuel burn, noise and emissions and is ready to enter service at this time." The three PW1100G-powered A320neo flight-test aircraft accumulated over 1,070 flight hours in more than 350 flights prior to aircraft certification.

The PW1100G-powered A320neo was certified close to schedule at the end of November, despite a number of engine-related issues during the flight-test program. Following the start of flight tests in September 2014, the first known issue developed in April 2015, following a bird strike on the first aircraft, MSN6101. Post-incident inspections unearthed a problem with a seal-retaining snap ring component buried so deep in the core that it required engine removal and replacement. The aircraft was subsequently grounded for four months, and only resumed flights in September.

The second test-aircraft, MSN6286, meanwhile joined the program in March 2015 but was also grounded through May, June and the majority of July while the same engine issue was corrected. Despite the recent certification, the second aircraft continues to fly, most recently conducting test and training missions around northern and western France. A third test aircraft -- which was largely dedicated to building up hours on simulated airline-type operations -- is also continuing to fly. Through early December, it has been flying medium-range flights from France to Spain and Finland.

Additional issues hit the PW1100G in October, when the first Pratt & Whitney-powered aircraft was completing hot-weather tests in Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates. Although the aircraft performed well during the tests, Pratt made the decision to remove one of the engines as a precautionary move, after borescope inspections showed evidence of minor rubbing between the blades of the high-pressure compressor and the compressor wall. The aircraft diverted to Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt, and remained there for 11 days while a new engine was fitted. This aircraft also continues in test and is currently conducting high altitude takeoff and landing performance work in El Alto, Bolivia.

SOURCE: ATW

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