



Y'ALL KEEP FLYING! TOP 10 SOUTHEAST US AEROSPACE PLANTS

News / Manufacturer



As Airbus turns the crank to start A320 assembly at its new plant in Mobile, Alabama, we thought we'd take a look at where the plant stands in the pecking order of aerospace factories in one of the world's fastest-growing **aerospace** regions – the southeast USA. Perhaps no surprise, leading our **top 10** – based on expected annual delivery value at list prices in 2020 – is Boeing's 787 plant at Charleston, South Carolina; pictured is the first 787 to roll off that line, in March 2015.

1. Boeing – Charleston, South Carolina ~\$25.2bn*

It was a bold move when Boeing planned to have just two suppliers – Alenia and Vought – build aft fuselages and assemble them into centre fuselages for the 787 at a new factory in North Charleston. When the suppliers proved unable to cope with the task, Boeing took over the operation, establishing itself in South Carolina for the first time. Then a climate of unrest in Seattle drove the company to look for final assembly capacity elsewhere, and North Charleston proved to be an ideal base. Attempts by Boeing's union to organise the South Carolina factory have so far been unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the factory is growing to produce seven 787s a month by 2018, and serve as the exclusive assembly point for the 787-10 model.

*Projected based on maximum-announced capacity

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787 no. 1, Charleston – welcome, United

Boeing

2. Lockheed Martin – Marietta, Georgia ~\$1.5 billion

Few aerospace plants match this site's heritage. Billed today as "Home of the Mighty Hercules" for its 60-year run assembling the C-130 and C-130J airlifters, the plant has also built the B-29 Superfortress and B-47 Stratojet bombers, C-141 StarLifter, C-5 Galaxy and now C-5M Super Galaxy strategic airlifters, P-3 Orion maritime surveillance aircraft, F-22 Raptor and F-35 centre wing assembly – along with the LASA-60, JetStar VIP transport and XV-4 vertical lift testbed.

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Made in Marietta

Nara Archive/Rex Shuttstock

3. Gulfstream – Savannah, Georgia ~\$2bn

General Dynamics' business jets division manufactures large and ultra-large models adjacent to its headquarters, where it also runs a major service centre. The site's significance grew with the introduction of the G500 and G600 programmes. Gulfstream is assembling both aircraft in Savannah and taking back wing assembly work from suppliers. A new factory has been built in the city to accommodate the programmes.

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We call Savannah home

Gulfstream

4. Embraer – Melbourne, Florida ~\$175m*

Located adjacent to Melbourne International airport is a cluster of Embraer facilities, including final assembly plants for its Phenom 100 and 300 business jets, a customer centre and an engineering and technology centre opened in 2014. Next year, the Legacy 450 and 500 will start being assembled here.

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Phenom(enal)

Embraer

5. Embraer – Jacksonville, Florida ~\$120m

The Brazilian airframer chose Jacksonville for its US defence and homeland-security operations in

2003. The first A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft rolled off the assembly line in November 2014 for the US Air Force, which is using the type to bolster the capabilities of its Afghan counterpart.

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Super Tucano, Afghan-style

US Air Force

6. Bell Helicopter – Lafayette, Louisiana (TBD)

Assembly operations for the Bell 505 JRX are expected to start by 2016, following certification of the facility and the aircraft.

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Bell 505 JRX

Bell Helicopter

7. Airbus – Mobile, Alabama ~\$5bn*

The plant was first proposed to missionise A330-based tankers that Northrop Grumman, and later EADS North America, offered to the US Air Force (USAF). The USAF's bid to replace its ageing aerial tanker fleet turned into a highly politicised affair, which saw Northrop beat Boeing, only to have the award overturned on appeal by Boeing – which went on to win, with its now in-development KC-46, over a second attempt by Airbus to win the deal. No tanker didn't mean no Mobile for Airbus, though. With a bulging backlog of narrowbody orders, Mobile became an ideal site to create additional production capacity for A320s.

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Mobile in Mobile

Airbus

8. Airbus Helicopter – Columbus, Missouri ~\$510m

Opened in 2004 “to meet growing US business volume”, this facility produces the AS350 B2/B3 AStar commercial helicopter and the US Army's UH-72A Lakota light utility helicopter.

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The US Army rather likes its US-built European machines

Airbus Helicopters

9. HondaJet – Greensboro, North Carolina \$360m*

Several years late, the light business jet was finally given provisional certification earlier this year. Honda has been pursuing its light-jet dream for 12 years. The huge factory is sized to produce at least 80-100 jets a year.

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Coming soon(ish)

HondaJet

10. Piper – Vero Beach, Florida \$200m

Piper makes it range of 10 propeller models – from light piston singles to single turboprops – at its longstanding home base.

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M600: in development, in Vero Beach

Piper Aircraft

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