BOEING’S NEW 737 ECONOMY SEATS ARE INSPIRED BY OFFICE FURNITURE

News / Manufacturer

In a move that could foresee big changes in aircraft seat manufacturing, Boeing is purchasing seats for the 737 direct from a new supplier.

LIFT by EnCore, the new seat manufacturer Boeing has picked to deliver better economy seats to the 737 Boeing Sky Interior, is on a mission to give a big comfort boost to passengers in the cheap seats.

"It's the forgotten class, I think," said Tom McFarland, EnCore's owner and CEO. "The higher end — when you get to the front of the plane — gets a lot more attention. That was our driver: to focus on the Economy seat."

Which is what we all like to hear, but don't be deceived: Making sure that plane manufacturers, airlines and passengers are happy with a new seat proposal is a tall order. There will always be compromises.

LIFT seats attempt to make the compromises work. The slimline seats are modeled in passengers' favor with design crossovers from modern home furnishings, through a collaboration with London-based Pearson Lloyd.

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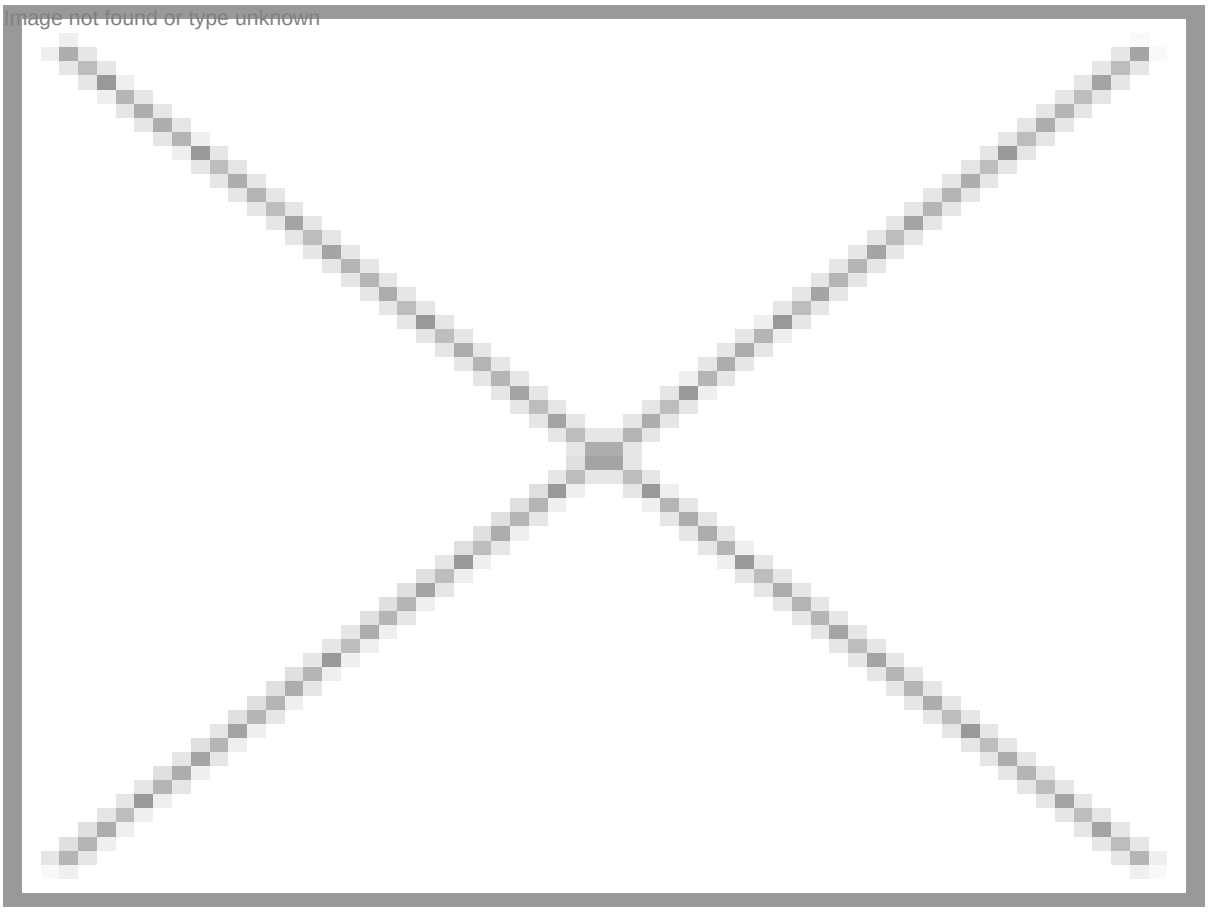

All the details are considered for functionality in tight quarters. For example, you don't have to bend over to plug in your electronics, because the outlet is above the tray table.

The soft padded cushions on the LIFT seat were pressure tested — bum tested, to use industry jargon — to ensure your butt will hurt less after sitting in place for a few hours. The seat backs are contoured to the spine and there is padding to rest your head.

It’s the plane equivalent of a modern office chair — it’s not your cozy love seat, but it gets the job done.

"Number one: it's got to be a comfortable product," said Elijah Dobrusin, VP of development and strategy. "We're making a seat. We worked with Pearson Lloyd and Boeing to make it look like a seat, not some weird spaceship thing. It's a seat."

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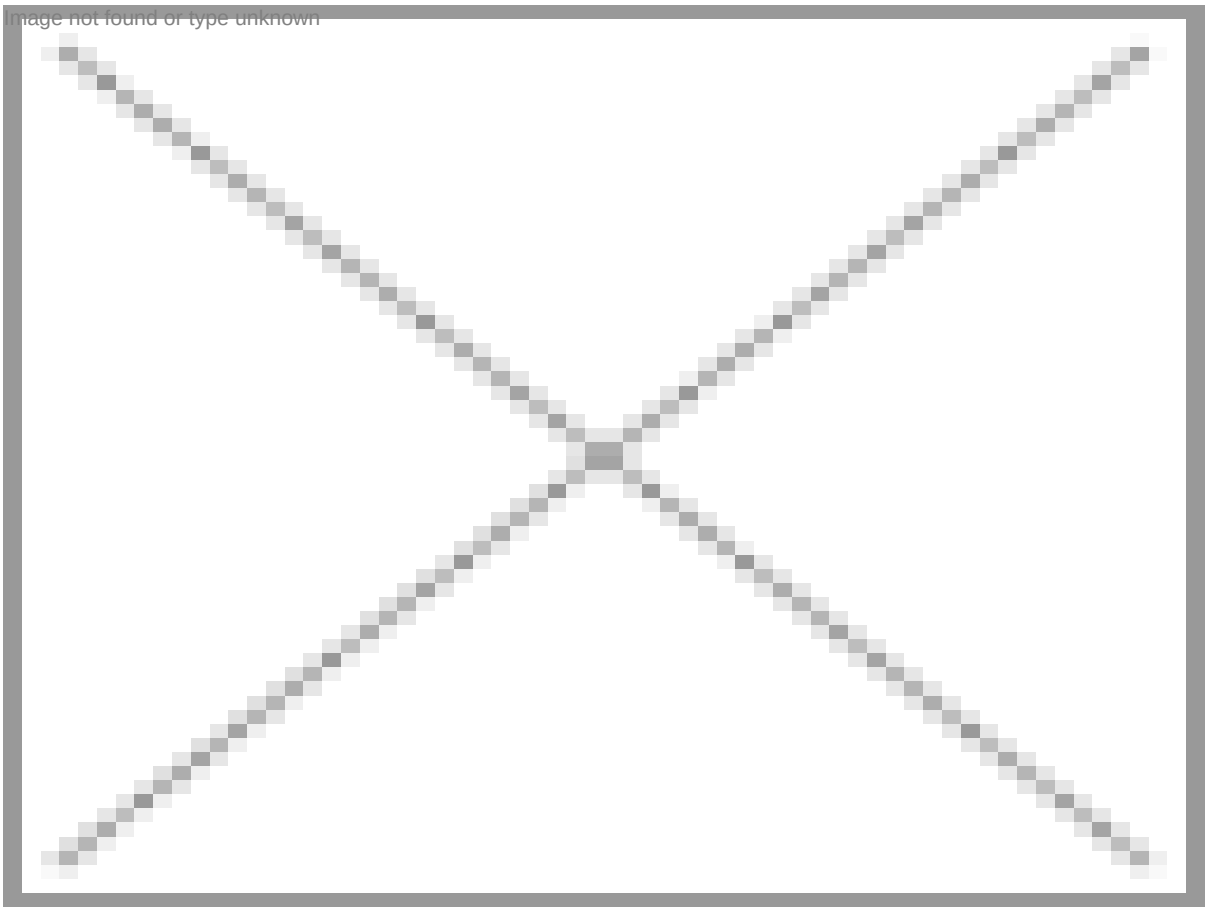

The question some in the airline industry are asking is: Who are these people? How did LIFT get on Boeing overnight, shifting the seat of power in the plane seat industry?

Because aviation doesn't change overnight — except when it does. Many big changes and blue sky ideas have taken off because outside forces drove competition in an unexpected direction.

Business and first class passengers take lie-flat seats for granted today, but British Airways came up with what was a crazy idea 20 years ago, and people watched and wondered — until everyone else jumped on it.

Just as with the very innovative team at British Airways, there are experienced contrarians at the top seats of EnCore.

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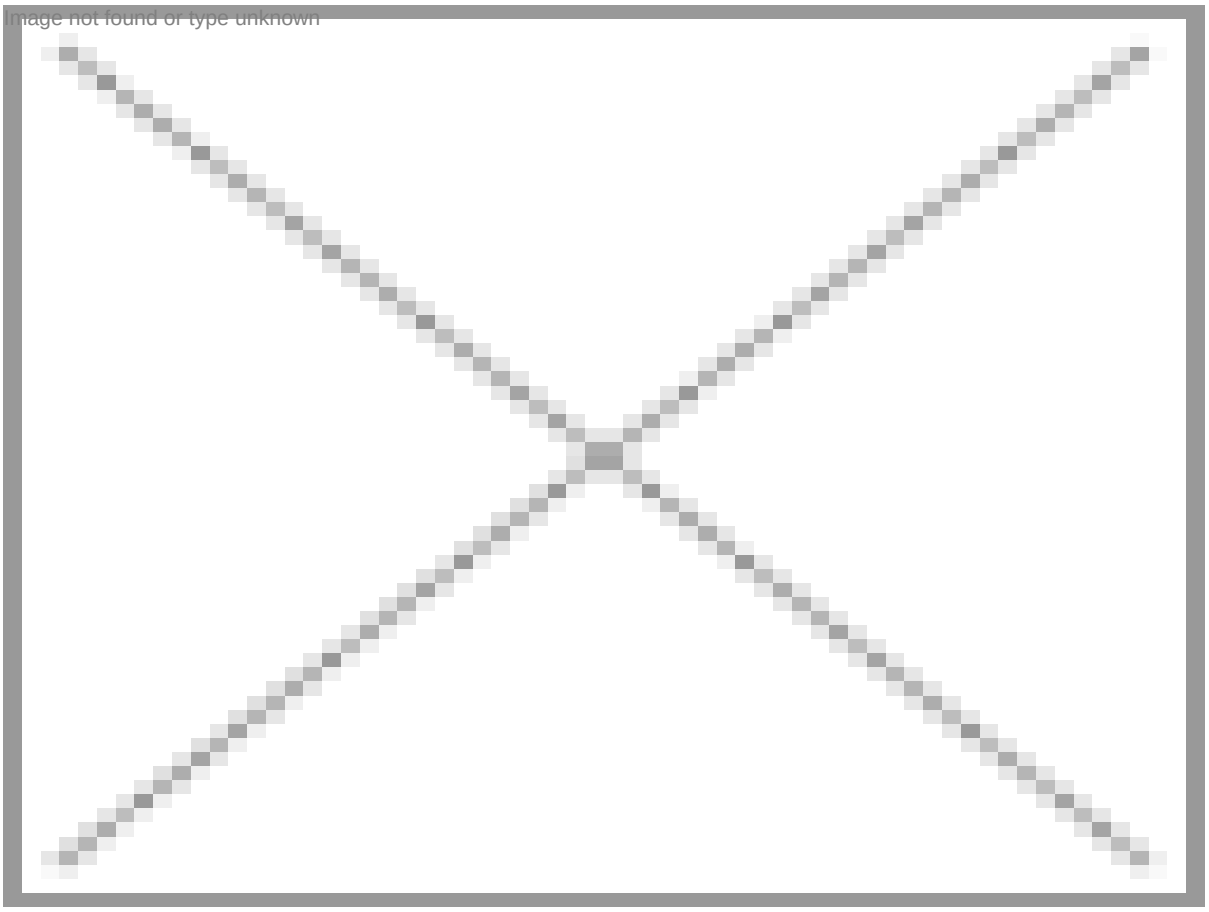

Before launching EnCore, the founders had over 30 years of aircraft interiors and seat manufacturing experience under their belts.

LIFT by EnCore is not so much an upstart disrupter as returning troublemaker. The execs hired bright young minds inside the industry, who themselves had plenty of expertise, and who hungered to break away from "the way we've always done it" mentality that can plague aviation.

Finding the right caliber of experienced people with a disruptive mindset is not easy in an industry as conformist as aviation.

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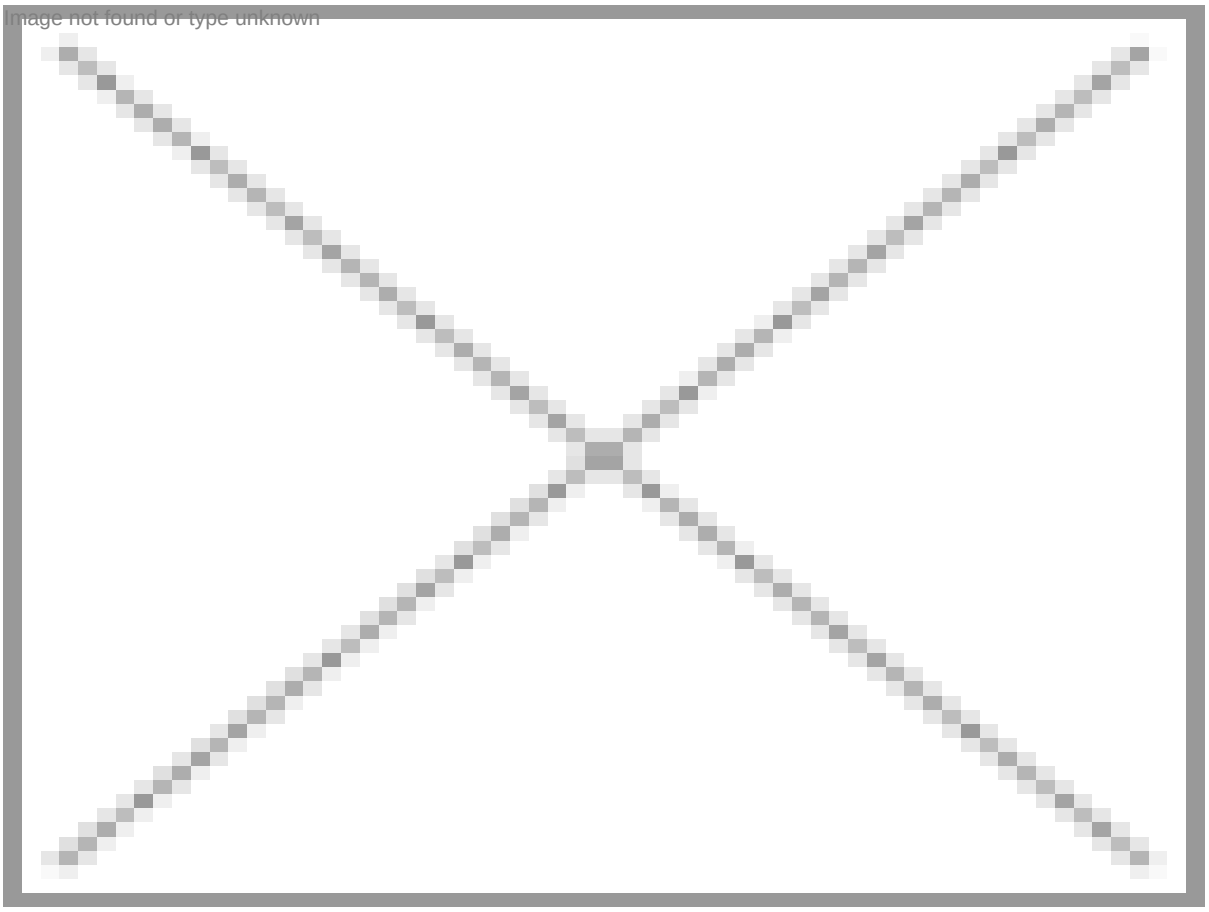

"We've all come from well established companies in the aerospace industries so we have a number of experts that work together and that allows us to work very fast, very lightly," said Tom Eaton, director of design at LIFT by EnCore.

All that experience the leadership of EnCore and team at LIFT built over decades of working with Boeing earned them credibility and trust, which made collaboration possible.

"Boeing are providing a lot of the technical knowledge: for instance, composites. Boeing has this incredible composite technology; with the 787 they've done some amazing things, said Dobrusin. "We've had workshops and meetings with them, where we're bringing Boeing technology into our product. It's been a great combination."

Keeping people happy

People watching makes all the difference. The LIFT folks echoed what Airbus said about the during the reveal of their Airspace cabin in London.

"Many reporters writing about the airline cabin didn't exist. People weren't blogging about the industry. Social media is pushing the industry to become more aware," said Dobrusin. "People who flew hated it — but that's just how it was. Now social media is pushing the industry to become more aware, and that's where we started."

While the first LIFT seat was designed for the 737 Boeing Sky interior, the companies are discussing future projects.

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"This is just the start for us," Dobrusin added. "Our intent is to bring really great products and leave a really great footprint, improve the process and the cycle of our industry. I think there's no reason why things can't move a lot faster than they do."

14 APRIL 2016

SOURCE: MASHABLE
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