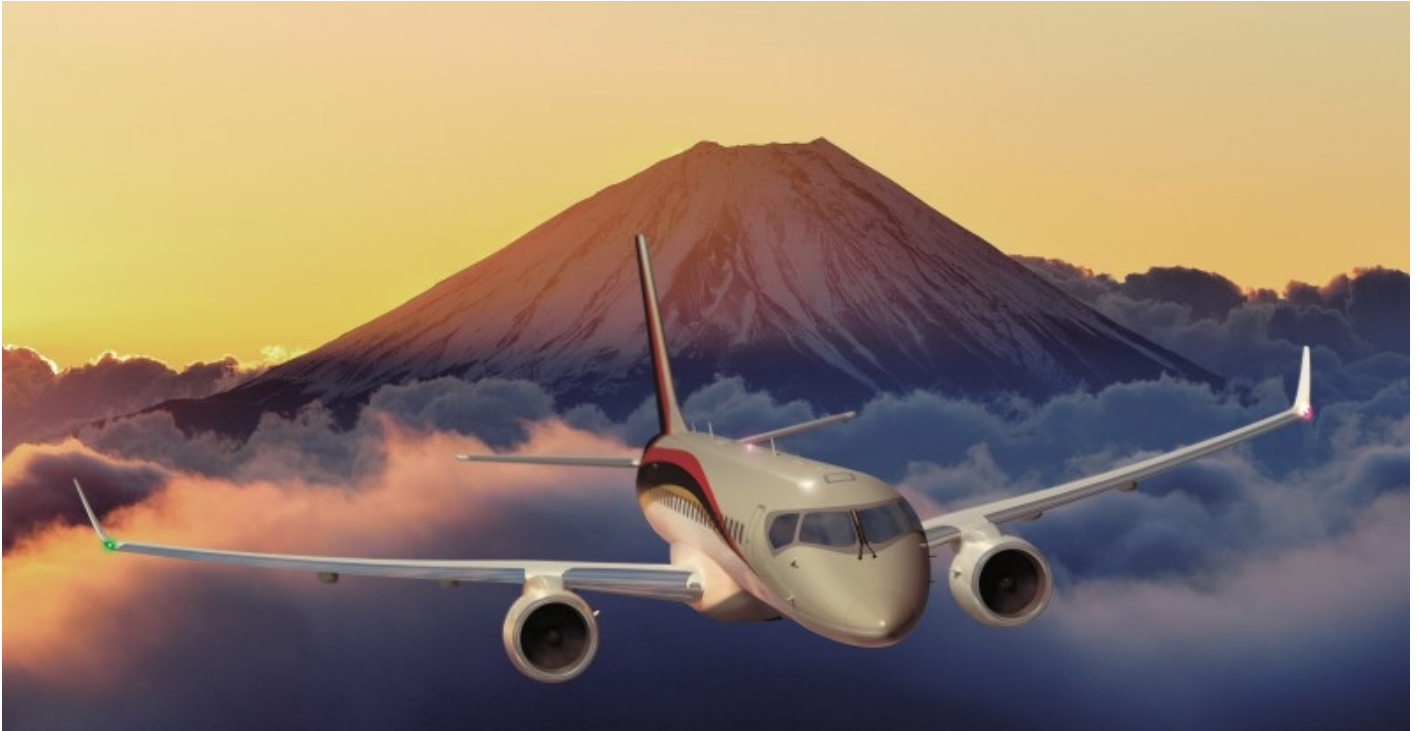




MITSUBISHI TALKS MRJ SALES AS NEW DAY DAWNS FOR JAPANESE AVIATION

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Having achieved first flight this month, the **Mitsubishi** Regional Jet (**MRJ**) fulfilled a promise that dates back eight years to the Paris Air Show of June 2007: to create the first modern **Japanese** jet airliner. Like a number of other upcoming airframers, it's using the 70-100 seater large regional jet market to do it.

It is certainly a crowded market, but geopolitics might be on Mitsubishi's side. In the context of the ongoing frosty relationship between the Kremlin and the West that affects Russian aircraft like the Sukhoi Superjet, perception issues around Comac's ARJ21 and C919 in China, and Bombardier's well-documented issues with the CSeries, the Japanese company would appear to be one of the stronger international challengers to Embraer's dominance in the future 70-100 seater battle. The Brazilians, of course, have had their own well-documented issues with the much-vaunted E2 cabin's safety certification.

Japan has been a significant player in commercial aviation for some time. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI), the parent corporation of MRJ airframer Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation (MAC), manufactures aircraft components including the composite wing box for the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, as well as parts for the 777, about which Mitsubishi says, "The 777 transport is an aircraft jointly developed under the international cooperation of Japan and the US. The work share of Japan is approximately 20%, with MHI manufacturing the aft fuselage panel, tail fuselage, and entry doors."

In the absence of an overseas media event at the launch two weeks ago, Runway Girl Network quizzed Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation's Yugo Fukuhara, Vice President and General Manager for Sales and Marketing in detail in advance of the flight testing programme, due to start in Japan and the United States before the first delivery, currently planned for Q2 2017.

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In terms of prospective markets for the MRJ70 and MRJ90, "currently our main focus is on North America and Europe (North America is the largest market)," Mitsubishi's Fukuhara says. "In the US, we are promoting MRJ70 and MRJ90 as the replacement for the current 50-seat jets. In Europe, there are old regional aircraft, such as the Fokker or British Aerospace [146/Avro RJ], that are expected to be replaced, so we are promoting MRJ70 and MRJ90 or the [as yet unlaunched] 100-seater as their replacements. We are also looking at Asia & Pacific, which is the world's fast growing market. For the demand by region, we are projecting 30% of our sales in North America, 20% in Europe, and 20% in Asia, with 30% in the rest of the world. We are conducting our sales activities based on this projection."

Mitsubishi's market overview focusses on North america

The MRJ's current total order book stands at 407 aircraft, with 223 of those firm orders, 160 as options, and 24 as purchase rights. This order book is overwhelmingly from the major US regional operators, with Skywest ordering and optioning 100 each, Trans States ordering and optioning 50 each, Eastern taking 20 and 20, JAL ordering 32, ANA ordering 15 and optioning 10, and Air Mandalay ordering 6 and optioning 4.

Fukuhara also expects Australasia to figure in its future. "Australia and New Zealand have city-pairs in their vast land areas that are out of reach with turboprop aircraft. Additionally, (except those between large cities) there are routes that are expected not to meet demand adequate for operating with high frequency mid- to large-size aircraft, larger than narrow-body aircraft. The superior efficiency and comfort of the MRJ will enable customers to fly the aircraft with higher frequency even for routes with relatively longer range and lower demand, which will help improve the convenience of passengers. Its low-noise advantage will also help reduce noise area in the neighborhood of an airport near a densely populated area."

"Considering the future outlook of the 70-100 seat regional market," Mitsubishi's Fukuhara said, "we see the E-Jet E2 series of Embraer as the most competitive aircraft. Demand during the next 20-year period is projected to be approximately 5000 units. We would like to target half of the share."

And how to do that? Passenger experience seems to be a major part of the battle. Ticking off bullet points, Mitsubishi's Fukuhara referred to its "spacious cabin", boasted that it is "the most comfortable economy class in the sky" with "no middle seat, ever", and the "widest economy seat available". The "tallest cabin" (quoted at 203cm, 80 inches) also features "larger overhead bins".

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"The MRJ has a two-class seat configuration: economy class and premium class," Mitsubishi's Fukuhara noted, highlighting the ability to accommodate a 2-1 layout in the pointy end. The company wouldn't be drawn on other premium options though, stating, "We propose the most appropriate seat configuration to each customer based on their needs."

Economy is laid out in a 2-2 configuration

Interestingly, the MRJ90's standard passenger numbers are 88 with the MRJ70 at 76, with Mitsubishi noting that the standard economy seating for these numbers is 31 inches. Clearly, that

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is below many airlines' shorthaul standard. Fukuhara noted, "The MRJ is also flexible to have a 29-inch pitch with the maximum 92 seats for the all-economy class setting due to its slim seats. There is no standard pitch for premium class seats since it will be decided by each customer."

While payload affects range, and is likely to vary as initial flight tests and modelled aerodynamics face up to real world conditions, Mitsubishi's Fukuhara told RGN that there are three range options, which currently have the MRJ90 ranging from 1,150nm (standard) up to 1,550nm (ER) or 2,040nm (LR). The smaller MRJ70 would span 1,020nm (standard) and 1,670nm (ER) to 2,020nm (LR).

The small MRJ is aimed at the Embraer E-Jet family

Despite delays — one in April "in order to fully incorporate the verification results of the various ground tests and related feedback into the first flight test aircraft" and one in October "because of the need for upgrade of the rudder pedal", if the MRJ can stay on track it certainly looks like it might be a contender.

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