



AIRBUS PURSUES SAUDIA A380 ORDER WITH SUPERDENSE 615 SEATER

News / Airlines, Manufacturer



Airbus Group SE is aiming to seal a prospective **Saudi order for the A380 superjumbo** by pitching a **new 615-seat**, two-class version it says would be the ideal congestion-buster for carrying pilgrims to Mecca.

The European plane maker has offered Saudi Arabian Airlines, known as Saudia, the high-density layout to be pioneered by leading A380 customer Emirates on its Copenhagen route next week, Habib Fekih, its head of sales for the Middle East, said in an interview.

Just a “handful” of high-capacity double-deckers could help ease pressure on Saudi infrastructure “by many folds,” Fekih said in Dubai. Before this year, the densest A380 layout — also at Emirates — featured 517 seats.

Saudia Chief Executive Officer Abdul Mohsen Jonaid said last month that he was evaluating the A380 as part of a plan to swell the fleet to 200 planes by 2020 from 119 now in order to add flights at the new Jeddah airport opening in 2017. The carrier declined to comment further on Fekih’s

comments Thursday.

Second-Hand Market

Leasing firm Amedeo, the only new A380 buyer in the past three years, said it's involved in campaigns to find new users for superjumbos due to become available second-hand and views the plane as the best option for meeting the levels of demand facing Saudia on Makkah and Umrah pilgrimages.

Amedeo aims to create a used-A380 market by 2018 involving aircraft released from Dubai-based Emirates and Singapore Airlines Ltd., the model's first operator, Mark Lapidus, the lessor's CEO, said in a separate interview.

Traffic linked to the year-round Umrah is expected to increase 10-fold to 60 million people by 2018, based on the number of visas the Saudi authorities plan to issue, Lapidus said.

Airbus's higher-capacity A380 features 58 business seats and 120 in economy on the top deck, plus 437 in economy below, based on the Emirates layout. Air Austral, which serves the island of Reunion, shows no sign of taking two A380s in an 840- berth layout after a strategy change, while Transaero Airlines of Russia, which specified a 652-seat plan for four jets, has ceased flying.

Airbus sales chief John Leahy said this month at the Dubai Air Show that the company is in negotiations to sell as many as 32 A380s to two airlines, with one looking at as many as 20 aircraft and the other 10 to 12. The number of planes involved and the fact that they'd be new would appear to rule out Saudia as of the potential buyers. Leahy said the orders might be secured this year, though deals could equally come in 2016.

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