



JAPAN'S FIRST COMMERCIAL JET IN 50 YEARS MAKES MAIDEN FLIGHT

News / Manufacturer



Japan's first commercial jet in half a century made its maiden flight on Wednesday, in a breakthrough for the country's long-held ambition to establish an aircraft industry that can compete with some of the major players in global aviation.

The Mitsubishi Regional Jet (MRJ) took off on a one-hour return flight from Nagoya Airport to test Mitsubishi Aircraft Corp's ability to bring the 100-seat class plane into service after three years of delays.

The unit of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which built the World War Two-era Zero fighter, is hoping the US\$47-million regional jet will help it oust Canada's Bombardier Inc as the world's second-biggest maker of smaller passenger jets behind Brazil's Embraer SA.

The MRJ is Japan's first commercial passenger aircraft since the 64-seat YS-11 entered service 50 years ago.

The first MRJ is slated for delivery in June 2017 to Japan's biggest carrier, ANA Holdings.

Mitsubishi aims eventually to sell more than 2,000 aircraft in the competitive market segment.

So far it has secured 223 firm orders, most recently in January when Japan Airlines asked for 32 planes. The biggest single purchase, for 100 aircraft, was from U.S. regional airline operator Trans State Holdings.

Mitsubishi says the MRJ burns a fifth less fuel than aircraft of similar size, thanks to new-generation engines from Pratt & Whitney, a subsidiary of United Technologies Corp .

Japan's last attempt to establish itself as a commercial aircraft maker ended in failure. Production of the YS-11, built by a consortium that included Mitsubishi Heavy, finished after only 182 planes were built.

That programme however helped Mitsubishi Heavy and other companies forge ties with Boeing Co, turning them into major suppliers and partners of the U.S. aircraft maker and helping revive an aerospace industry that was dismantled after World War Two.

Those Japanese companies build 35 percent of Boeing's advanced 787 carbon-composite jetliner, including the wings, the most complex part.

Japan's biggest carmaker, Toyota Motor Corp, and largest trading company, Mitsubishi Corp, each own a 10 percent stake in the MRJ venture.

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