

AEROSPACE UPDATE

Boeing marks milestone with fuselage

The 5,000th fuselage for a Boeing 737 aircraft has been completed by Spirit AeroSystems Inc. and is ready for shipment by rail to Renton, Wash., for final assembly.

Employees at the Wichita, Kan., plant — formerly part of Boeing's commercial aircraft operation — had a celebration Tuesday to mark the milestone. All but the first two fuselages were built in Wichita, where the plane's engine struts and nacelles, the vertical fin and horizontal stabilizer, inboard and outboard flaps, and front and rear wing spars also are made.

Production work on the 737 began in 1965, and Boeing delivered the first one to Lufthansa in 1967. The 5,000th in the series will go to Southwest Airlines, the company's biggest 737 customer, in February. About 4,200 of the planes still are in use.

Spirit AeroSystems employs 1,000 employees in Tulsa and McAlester.

Employees who designed and built the 737 fuselages over the years were honored at Tuesday's celebration.

Ron Brunton, Spirit AeroSystems' vice president and chief operating officer, said the Wichita plant got the 737 fuselage work because Boeing "didn't know where else to put it."

"And nobody else wanted it," he said.

For years, work on the 737 has made up 60 percent of all the work at the Wichita plant. Boeing now has more than 1,000 of the planes on order. The 737 was redesigned in the 1990s. Recently, Boeing introduced its 737-900ER, an extended-range aircraft that can carry 215 passengers.

The Associated Press



BY PAUL HELLSTERN, THE OKLAHOMAN

Spirit Wing Aviation technicians David Brooks, foreground, and Blaine McColgin work on parts last week for the XP space plane being built at Spirit Wing in Guthrie.

Rocketplane makes parts in Guthrie

Commercial flights in space are the goal

By Julie Bisbee, Business Writer

Tucked away in a large metal hangar just off the main road into Guthrie, a space plane is being built.

Rocketplane Limited Inc. earlier this month moved designers of its space plane from the company's headquarters in Oklahoma City to the Guthrie airport so they can make changes as workers begin putting it together. The move marks a milestone for the company that has been driving toward commercial space travel.

Rocketplane's version of a space plane, based loosely on a Learjet, is expected to be ready for test flights in 2006. Travel for passengers spending about \$200,000 for a ride is expected to begin in 2007.

With drawings in front of them, workers from Spirit Wing Aviation, a Guthrie-based company that specializes in Learjet modifications, is building the plane's parts.

"When they started the project, Learjet referred them to us," said Kevin Cook, operations director for Spirit Wing.

Spirit Wing is working on an engine modification project that would put quieter, more fuel efficient engines in older Learjet airplanes. The company has flight tested its engine and planes extensively, Cook said.

Workers from Spirit Wing will make the parts for the plane, then the components will be tested until they fail. The testing allows engineers and designers to know what sort of changes are needed to make the plane safer for its suborbital flight that will take it about 62 miles above the Earth, said David Faulkner, XP program manager for Rocketplane.

In a hangar converted into office space, designers simply can walk through a door to see how a part designed on their computers is being made.

"There's a lot of excitement about this project," Faulkner said. "We get to be here personally and see it come together."

The design process is expected to take about 35,000 man hours. Assembly and testing will take about twice as long, Faulkner said. This comes as Rocketplane leads the race to get commercial pas-



BY PAUL HELLSTERN, THE OKLAHOMAN

XP Program Manager Dave Faulkner, left, Manufacturing Manager for Rocketplane Limited Inc. Barry Reynolds, center, and Kevin Cook, director of operations for Spirit Wing Aviation Ltd., last week look at a part of the wing structure for the XP space plane being constructed at Spirit Wing in Guthrie.

sengers into space, but its competitors aren't far behind. Rocketplane will use the spaceport at Burns Flat to take off and land. The plane will take off like a business jet and then the rocket will begin to burn at about 20,000 feet and power the plane into suborbital space.

"From there they will be able to see the curvature of the Earth, the blackness of space," said Major Gen. Jay T. Edwards, the former commander of Tinker Air Force Base and director of government and regulatory affairs for Rocketplane. "They will see Earth the way God sees it."

For commercial space travel, the plane has to be certified by the Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Travel, a division of the Federal Aviation Administration.

The plane will have to follow the same reliability standards as a commercial airplane, which means the airplane can't injure or kill one person in 30 million flights. To meet this criteria, the plane will fly out of rural western Oklahoma and its flight path will be over rural Oklahoma and Kansas.

The FAA's administration for commercial space travel classifies the aircraft as experimental, so passengers who chose to fly on it will sign a waiver, Edwards said. "But it's not experimental. The technology we are using was developed in the 1950s," he said. "We're going to have a minimum of 25 successful test flights before we take paying passengers, so it won't be like everybody is holding their breath on the first flight."

TRANSPORTATION



Space plan designers move

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