

Air Transport World

Singapore Airlines signs on as A350-900ULR launch customer



Rendering of Airbus A350-900ULR in Singapore Airlines' livery.

Airbus launched an "ultra-long range" version of the A350-900 and Singapore Airlines (SIA) became the launch customer, converting seven of its 63 existing A350-900 orders to the A350-900ULR.

The new version of the A350 can fly up to 19 hours or 8,700 nautical miles. The airline plans to use the A350-900ULRs, the

first of which is expected to be delivered in 2018, between Singapore and the US. SIA has also placed an additional order for four more A350-900s.

According to Airbus, the A350-900ULR will include a modified fuel system to increase fuel carrying capacity, an increased maximum takeoff weight (MTOW) and aerodynamic improvements. SIA will be able to use the aircraft to serve points on the US West Coast as well as New York.

Airbus president and CEO Fabrice Brégier told ATW that the A350-900ULR was "possible with some limited modifications to the aircraft. But it will be not a new member of the A350 family, like the A350-1000, because it is a niche market."

SIA CEO Goh Choon Phong said "customers have been asking us to restart nonstop Singapore-US flights and we are pleased that Airbus was able to offer the right aircraft to do so in a commercially viable manner." SIA ended service from Singapore to Newark and Los Angeles in 2013 as it phased out its A340-500 fleet.

Finnair meanwhile, in October took delivery of the first of 19 A350s it has on order, flying the aircraft from Airbus's Toulouse factory to Helsinki to become the world's third and Europe's first airline to operate the new widebody. Finnair also announced two new Asia destinations that it will introduce in 2016, both made possible by the A350: Fukuoka, Japan and Guangzhou, China. Finnair is expected to have five A350s in its fleet by early 2016. (See article, page 18).