

# Atypical Delivery in the Still of the Night

by Muhammed Yilmaz



Positioned among the elite in the league of global airlines, in 2017 Turkish Airlines moved forward with a decision to procure the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Airbus 350 airplanes in line with plans of expanding and renewing its fleet with new generation

wide-body passenger aircraft. A memorandum of understanding was signed regarding the Boeing 787 Dreamliner in September 2017 at a ceremony in New York with the participation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Later, an important signing ceremony was conducted between Airbus and Turkish Airlines parties at the Elysee Palace in Paris on January 5, 2018. Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to France upon France's

President Emmanuel Macron's invitation and a ceremony to announce the initiation of Turkish Airlines' procurement negotiations for the Airbus A350-900 was held in the presence of the two heads of state,



© Airbus

where Turkish Airlines President & CEO İlker Aycı and Airbus CEO Tom Enders signed a memorandum of understanding.

According to the agreement signed during this period, the Airbus A350s which enabled a 25% improvement in fuel consumption and harmful

gas emissions, would give THY an advantage in reaching its targets. However, nobody present at the Elysee Palace on that day could have even guessed what the future had in store. Unbeknownst to the world, the tension between the two presidents and two

countries would escalate by the delivery time of the aircraft, and that due to the pandemic the aviation sector would go through turmoil and turbulence so severe, and that these factors would influence the delivery of the aircraft.

The order for the aircraft was finalized at the Turkish Airlines Executive Board Meeting on March 9, 2018. In the public announcement it was declared that 30 aircraft orders would be placed (25 final and 5 optional) for each of the 787 Dreamliner and A350-900 models.

Regarding the delivery of the aircraft, it was stated that both models would be included in the fleet within 6 years; 6 aircraft in 2019, 14 in 2020, 10 aircraft in 2021, 12 in 2022, 11 in 2023 and 7 in 2024.

### **First Dreamliner in the fleet in June 2019, first A350 in march 2020!**

The first 787 Dreamliner of the Turkish Airlines was received at the end of June 2019 and joined the fleet while it was announced that the first A350 would be joining the fleet in March 2020 due to Airbus' busy production slots.

As the COVID-19 pandemic became a hot issue worldwide in mid-February, all stakeholders in the sector started to adopt radical decisions. The airlines began to frequent manufacturers with demands such as cancelling orders or

postponing deliveries. Later manufacturers' production lines were suspended due to quarantine conditions, and new production programs were prepared based on order cancellations and changes.

In light of the projections suggesting that the normalization of the sector would not occur before 2024 after the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, the executives of Turkish Airlines were amongst the airlines that visited Airbus to postpone the delivery of the aircraft, cancelling a part of the orders and changing the orders.

Two A350 aircraft dyed in THY's color scheme with completed test flights were made ready for order and these aircraft regularly appeared in images captured by Spotters in Toulouse. Often upon seeing these aircraft Spotters and curious onlookers would loudly inquire about the delivery date of the aircraft.

Meanwhile, a diplomatic crisis emerged between Turkey and France due to tension in the East Mediterranean and other political factors which added to Turkey's decision on boycotting French goods, and the delivery of the A350s turned into a bit of a fiasco. However, an essential detail missed at this point was that Airbus was a multi-national European Union brand, rather than a product of France. This set the stage for an interesting and unceremonious delivery.



© Turkish Airlines

## The most mysterious delivery in the history of Turkish Airlines!

It was announced that Turkish Airlines would be receiving the first two A350s on October 21st and right in the midst of a diplomatic conundrum. But the delivery of the first A350-900 was accomplished after a 24-hour delay. The TC-LGA registered aircraft took off from Toulouse on October 22nd, at 22:35 p.m. local time and it landed at Istanbul Airport on October 23rd at 02:35 a.m. local time.

The public speculated about the unanticipated delay, especially the recent 24-hour delay in the delivery of the A350s, yet no statements on the issue were made by the management of either Airbus or THY. The number of question marks increased as no special ceremony was conducted for the latest generation passenger aircraft included in THY's fleet and no news appeared in the conventional press, except for some in social media

and on a few websites. Not even an aviation water cannon salute at the airport was held when the first airplane touched down in Istanbul, rather the airplane was rushed in the middle of the night. All these peculiar events went down in THY's aircraft delivery history as one of the most atypical and mysterious deliveries on record.

## Business Class Seats remain unchanged

Turkish Airlines' A350-900 aircraft feature a two-classed cabin configuration with a total of 329 seats composed of 32 Business and 297 Comfort Economy seats. Moreover, the plane was equipped with the latest generation in-flight entertainment system offering HD screens and Wi-Fi connection to present a more pleasant passenger experience during long-distance flights. Passengers were not entirely pleased about the business class seats used by Turkish Airlines in the 787 Dreamliner. Therefore, it was expected that Turkish Airlines would

have used a new type of business class seat in the A350s. However, there were no changes to the business class seats.

Receiving the title of the longest ranged plane in THY's fleet, the A350 XWB features a new aerodynamic design, carbon fiber fuselage and wings as well as new generation fuel-efficient Rolls-Royce Trent XWB engines. Enabling matchless efficiency with a reduction by 25% in fuel consumption and emission, the cabin of the A350 is the quietest one in the twin-aisle aircraft class. And when combined with products for the modern aircraft, this offers the most comfortable flight experience for passengers and the crew. With the 2 new A350s received, the number of Airbus in THY's fleet reached 176.

## Turkish Airlines reaches an agreement with Airbus for postponing deliveries

Turkish Airlines declared a total loss of TRY 5.2 billion in the first 9-month period

of 2020 and a decision was made to decrease the yearly deliveries to "reasonable levels" and to cancel part of the orders if deemed necessary in the negotiations with the investors.

After the launch of operations upon receiving the first 2 A350s, Chief Financial Officer at Turkish Airlines, Murat Şeker declared that they reached an agreement with Airbus for postponing the delivery of new aircraft. According to the new schedule planned based on THY's operational and financial capacities and the conditions stipulated by the agreement, THY's need of US\$ 5.2 billion in financing was delayed until after 2024. The delivery schedule of the aircraft was extended to 2028 with the agreement. There is an order of 69 A321neos and 23 A350-900s waiting for THY to be received from Airbus.

It is said that the signing of a similar agreement by THY and Boeing for postponing the deliveries was quite possible. THY has not yet received the delivery of the 63 737MAXs and the 11 787-9 Dreamliners from Boeing.



## From an Idea to a Product: Airbus A350

Let's take a look at the critical milestones in the transformation of A350 XWBs, included in the Turkish Airlines fleet, and how it progressed from an idea into a product.

When the American manufacturer Boeing announced the development of the 787 Dreamliner model, Airbus did not respond immediately. Then, when the specific features such as the new generation systems of the 787s and the utilization of a high rate of composite material compared to existing airplanes were revealed, the idea of modernizing the A330 emerged for Airbus. This aircraft that could be named as A330 200 Lite might be a rival of Boeing's 787 model with new generation wings and engines.

This suggestion was not quite approved by the potential customers of Airbus. The Farnborough Airshow in 2004 was not efficient for Airbus from this perspective and it became obvious that if they wanted to meet the demands of airlines, they would need to design a new airplane from scratch.

The then CEO of Airbus, Noel Forgeard publicly declared the launch of a new project for the first time on September 16, 2004 yet did not give any details on the activities carried out. It was not clear whether the development activities conducted were for a derived design or a brand-new design. As negative feedback from customers continued, Airbus launched the official start of the new A350 project on

September 30, 2014 by allocating €4 billion, after receiving the EASA Type Certificate.

The new design particularly with a similar fuselage of the A330 featured new wings and horizontal tails in addition to a higher level of the utilization of composite materials, and the methodology of its production had changed. Hence, we faced a brand-new airplane design.

On December 10, 2004, the airplane was named A350 and on June 16, 2005 it was announced that a contract on the order for 60 Airbus A350 XWBs was signed between Qatar Airways and Airbus at the 2005 Paris Airshow.

A development budget of €3.5 billion was allocated for the project on October 6, 2005. A twin-engine

airplane with the capacity of 250-300 passengers was designed in the fuselage of the A330. The wings and engines were going to be redesigned, but instead of the carbon fiber based composite material used in the Boeing 787, the design would be based on the conventional Aluminum-Lithium alloy.

Two versions of Airbus A350 were planned to be built:

- A350-800, in 3-class configuration with 253 passengers and a range of 16,300 km,
- A350-900 in 3-class configuration with 300 passengers and with a range of 13,900 km.

In this way, the new airplane of Airbus would be able to compete both with Boeing's 777 and 787-9.

In July 2006, Airbus once more announced at the



© Airbus

Farnborough Airshow that it had designed an airplane from scratch and that it would name it the A350 XWB (Extra Wide Body). 20 + 20 orders were placed by Singapore Airlines at the fair. The respect for and approval of the A350 were increasing.

The delays in the A380 program in December 2006 affected the A350's destiny a bit negatively. Airbus was suffering a financial bottleneck. It declared a postponement in the delivery of the first A350.

On December 4, 2006, certain new details of the design were announced publicly. New negotiations that were being conducted with the owners of the existing orders due to the increase in cost of the redesigned A350 XWB's.

The alteration in the design of the A350 XWB resulted in an additional two years in the development program. Eventually, the estimated development costs increased from €5.5 billion to almost €10 billion. Airbus declared that the maiden flight

was postponed albeit the date of the initial delivery remained the same. The postponement would be covered by decreasing the test program of the aircraft from 15 months to 12 months.

At a private meeting in September 2007, where nearly 100 existing and potential A350 customers gathered, developments on the design of the new aircraft were presented.

On November 12, 2010, Airbus announced that due to the problems that occurred in the passage to the production stage from the design stage, the date for the first delivery would

be delayed to the end of 2013 from mid-2013.

On December 29, 2011, the first fuselage part of the airplane was shipped to the final assembly line.

On April 5, 2012, the construction and assembly of the first static A350 model began.

The A350 met the skies for the first time on June 14, 2013. Thousands of viewers and Airbus employees witnessed the A350 XWB's maiden flight at Toulouse-Blagnac Airport. The 4-hour flight over the Pyrenees Mountains was performed by an Airbus test team

of six people, each with a parachute system, wearing orange overalls. During most of the tests, the focus was on the wings and landing gears.

The date of the first flight was scheduled for just before the Paris Airshow that would start a few days later. Meanwhile the number of total orders placed for the A350 reached 616 with 50 orders placed by Singapore Airlines.

On June 21, 2013, an airplane was spotted in the skies of the Paris Airshow around 13:30 towards the end of the third test flight. The visitors of the fair at the Le Bourget Airport enthusiastically applauded the A350 XWB and the airplane disappeared among the clouds, the A350 XWB had made an appearance at the most remarkable aviation industry event.

A 5-hour virtual commercial flight was conducted in Hamburg with the A350 on July 29, 2013. 129 passengers, 2 pilots and 8 cabin attendants tested



© Airbus

The world's first-delivered A350-900 aircraft – which was received in December 2014 by Qatar Airways – takes off on its delivery flight from Toulouse, France to Doha, Qatar

boarding, evacuation and regular in-flight activities as part of the flight factor tests.

On 22 December 2014, the first of the A350 XWBs was delivered to launching customer, Qatar Airways. The first commercial flight of the Airbus A350 XWB was conducted from Doha to Frankfurt, on January 15, 2015.

### A350 in 2 models

There are two models of the Airbus A350 XWB, namely the A350-900 and A350-1000.

The A350-900's range is 15,000 km; this airplane capable of carrying 300 to 350 passengers in the 3-class cabin layout is able to fly maximum 440 passengers. Its length is 66.8 meters and wingspan is 64.75 meters. Maximum take-off weight of the plane is 280 tons. Its maximum fuel capacity is 141 thousand liters. Moreover, upon Singapore Airlines' request, an ultra-long version of the A350 (A350ULR - Ultra Long Range) was built. The number of seats was reduced as the fuel capacity and range of the airplane were increased.

The A350-1000's range, on the other hand, is 16,100 km, capable of carrying 350 to 410 passengers in a 3-class cabin layout. The A350-1000 is capable of flying a maximum of 440 passengers. Its length is



© Airbus

nearly 74 meters and has the same 64.75 meter wing-span with the 900 model. Maximum take-off weight of the airplane is 316 tons and its maximum fuel capacity is 159 thousand liters.

### How many orders has the A350 Received?

According to the figures as of October 2020, the A350 model received a total of 930 orders from 50 different customers. Out of this figure, 391 airplanes

were delivered to the customers. 762 of these orders were placed for the A350-900 model; 168 of them were for the A350-1000 model. Delivery of 341 A350-900 models and 50 A350-1000s were accomplished.

When examined, regardless the models Qatar Airways is the biggest A350 customer. The airlines placed an order of 34 for A350-900s and 42 for A350-1000s. The Doha based company received all the orders

placed for A350-900s; 18 of its orders placed for A350-1000s joined the fleet.

The biggest client of the A350-900s is Singapore Airlines. So far, the company has received 52 out of the 67 A350-900s it ordered.

The biggest client of the A350-1000 model is Qatar Airways with an order for 42 planes. 18 of the aircraft were received and are actively conducting flights

Shaping the future of air travel

930 Orders 391 Delivered

A350 XWB

A flexible, high-value Family

All new design delivering unrivalled levels of efficiency

Airspace cabin, perfect space for passengers and airlines

AIRBUS