

---

# SuperJet 100 Will Make Russia's Aircraft Industry Relevant Again

By Dave Demerjian May  
Wired News - 22/5/2008

---

Russian aerospace company Sukhoi has successfully tested its Superjet 100, a mid-sized airliner that could make Russia a player in the commercial aviation business.

The Superjet program marks a major step forward for Russia's civilian aircraft programs, which until now have shown the sophistication of a Piper Cub and have the sales figures to prove it. If this plane comes together the way Sukhoi and its partner, Finmeccanica SpA - Italy's biggest military company - hope, it could compete alongside regional jet biggies like Bombardier and Embraer and revitalize Russia's lagging aircraft industry. The two companies have invested more than \$1.5 billion in the project.

"All hope for Russia's commercial aviation future hangs on this plane," Richard Aboulafia, vice president of the Teal Group aerospace consulting firm, told Bloomberg. "With Finmeccanica involved, there could be a third regional aircraft force emerging."

Sukhoi's still got a long way to go before that happens.

The SuperJet can carry 70 to 95 passengers and is designed to replace creaking Russian planes like the ancient Tupolev 134 and Yakovlev 42. It's 100 feet long, has a wingspan of 90 feet and can cruise at 41,000 feet and 515 miles per hour. It made its first test flight earlier this week, five months behind schedule because of problems integrating components from more than 40 suppliers.

"The first flight is a challenging task, as the Sukhoi Superjet 100 is a new super product with excellent technical and flight characteristics," Mikhail Pogosyan, the company's CEO said after the test flight, which saw the plane cruise at 4,000 feet during a flight that lasted 65 minutes. "This aircraft is unique for Russia. Every minute of the first flight was both an exciting expectation and an impressive experience."

Translation: "We had high expectations for this maiden flight and we were not disappointed. We know we've got a plane that doesn't suck, and our competitors should be nervous."

Sukhoi conducted the test in secret, with Pogosyan telling the Moscow Times, "The Superjet is our child, and its birth is sacred. A pregnant woman would never invite the press and guests to watch how she delivers her child." Test pilot Alexander Yablontsev said the plane feels a lot like the Boeing jets he's flown and told the Times, "I'm so happy that I am speechless. I've finally done something manly after all these years."

They broke out the champagne after the test flight, but it's a bit early for celebrations. The company's got 600 more test flights scheduled, and it concedes

Russia isn't the only country jumping into the commercial plane business. China recently launched a new company to develop a mid-sized jet capable of carrying as many as 150 people, and Toyota Motor Co. is investing

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries confirmed in March that it would proceed with a project to develop Japan's first home-grown passenger jet aircraft.

So far Sukhoi has racked up 98 orders for the new plane, which will cost \$29 million apiece. most from little known airlines like Dalavia, Transaero, and Armavia (Armenia rocks!). As part of its fleet renewal program, Russian flag carrier Aeroflot has also placed an order for 45 of the planes.

"Our target markets are the U.S. and Western Europe," Valerio Bonelli, a spokesman for Alenia Aeronautica, the subsidiary of Finmeccanica responsible for the Superjet, told Moscow Times. "The Superjet has now showed that it can fly, so interest will be growing with every passing day."

<http://blog.wired.com/cars/2008/05/for-the-first-t.html>

---