

Gulf Coast Reporters' League

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*AEROSPACE
NEWSLETTER
SPECIAL
REPORT*

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A bi-monthly update of aerospace activities in the Gulf Coast I-10 region

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Photo by Michelle R. Thomas

JetBlue has named its A321 "BluesMobile," in honor of the city where it was built.

JetBlue takes A321 delivery

MOBILE, Ala.

The very first American-made Airbus aircraft taxied across the tarmac of the Airbus U.S. Manufacturing Facility one last time Monday morning, amid cheers from employees and visiting dignitaries and news media celebrating its delivery to airline customer JetBlue.

In keeping with JetBlue's custom of naming each passenger aircraft, the single-aisle A321's nose cone was emblazoned with

By Martha Simmons

"BluesMobile," a name that gets points both for its cool factor and its homage to the city where the \$115 million plane was built.

"There is no better place in the United States to build airplanes than Mobile, Alabama," said John Leahy, Airbus Chief Operating Officer – Customers. Leahy said the dream of building Airbus planes in the U.S. has been several decades in the making. "This is our American hometown.

"I am immensely proud to be here to participate in this first delivery from Mobile," he said. "Going from breaking ground on this facility three years ago to handing over the first Alabama-produced A321 today is an amazing accomplishment.



Photo by Michelle R. Thomas

The Airbus assembly line workers gathered in front of the JetBlue A321 during Monday's historic delivery of the jetliner.



By the numbers

Model: A321, largest of the A320 series
Seating: 185, single aisle
Engines: two IAE International V2500
List price: \$113.7 million
Wingspan: 35.8 m with winglets
Overall length: 44.51 m
Height: 11.76 m
Range: 5,950 km with winglets, can fly transatlantic
Cruising altitude: 12,000 m
Weight: 60 tons, equivalent to 11 African elephants
Note: A320 family is the world's best-selling single-aisle product line. Uses fly-by-wire system
Orders: more than 12,400
Delivered: 6,700
Customers: about 300 worldwide

“It’s a testament to how well executed this project was and how strong the teamwork has been here in Mobile and throughout Airbus,” Leahy said. “The Airbus U.S. Manufacturing Facility has brought together all the best aspects of our other assembly lines around the world, and it shows how Airbus people work hand in hand with our partners to deliver great aircraft to our customers.”

Perfect spring weather greeted hundreds of guests, including Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley and former Gov. Bob Riley, Lt. Gov. Kay Ivey, U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne, and David O’Sullivan, European Union Ambassador to the United States. Guests were seated in white chairs festooned with red, white and blue ribbons and pompoms with Airbus-trademarked handles.

In a nod to Alabama’s football fanaticism, Airbus marked the delivery with a celebration befitting a championship win. A cool breeze ruffled the white feather plumes atop the caps of the University of South Alabama marching band as they kicked off the proceedings, parading in their bright red uniforms to what must have seemed the drumbeat of progress to the officials, business leaders and economic developers who worked behind the scenes years earlier to bring this day to fruition.

USA cheerleaders leaped to the speakers’ stage to cheer for Airbus and JetBlue, the favorite teams of this day, with guests enthusiastically responding by shaking their red, white and blue pompoms.

When the USA band launched into the dramatic theme from the movie, “2001 A Space Odyssey, the new plane taxied to a position behind the speakers’ platform, preceded by hundreds of Airbus employees wearing blue T-

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Photo by Michelle R. Thomas

Many A320 series aircraft will be delivered at the Mobile Aeroplex, but none will be quite as historic as the first one.

shirts emblazoned with the number 1 and also shaking pompoms. Most of the 350 employees had been hired and trained together, and all had a hand in building and delivering the jet aircraft.

“You’ve done an amazing job building an incredible airplane,” JetBlue President and CEO Robin Hayes told the Airbus employees. “This plane is going to be flying from New York to Florida into the Caribbean, maybe even Cuba one day.”

In addition to the JetBlue A321 delivered on Monday, there are currently nine other A320 family aircraft in production at the facility. Airbus anticipates delivering four aircraft per month from the Mobile plant by the end of 2017. The initial deliveries will all be A320 series aircraft with the Current Engine Option (CEO), but will begin transitioning to New Engine Option (NEO) derivatives in late 2017.

The next delivery will be to American Airlines in a couple of weeks. Airbus will host celebrations when each airline receives its first U.S.-built Air-

bus plane, but none as elaborate as Monday’s event celebrating the first of the firsts, Airbus spokeswoman Mary Anne Greczyn said.

Before the BluesMobile starts making money for JetBlue, it will make one more stop. JetBlue spokeswoman Tamara Young said it will head from Mobile to Lake City, Fla. to have its wifi (or “FlyFi,” as the company calls it) and inflight entertainment systems installed.

Once that’s done, passengers are promised extra comfort on their journeys. Leahy drew laughter when he compared the narrow white folding chairs guests sat on to passenger accommodations of its rival.

“You’re sitting in the Boeing seats right now,” he said. Waving toward the shiny new BluesMobile, he noted, “The Airbus seat is substantially larger.”

In fact, said Hayes, the seats are about seven inches wider, roominess

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“There is no better place in the United States to build airplanes than Mobile, Ala.,”

- John Leahy, Airbus CEO

**AIRBUS
GROUP**

Founded: 1970

Corporate HQ: Blagnac, France

U.S. HQ: Herndon, Va.

Revenues: \$67 billion (FY 2015)

Employees: 136,574 (FY 2015)

Note: Formerly named EADS, European Aeronautic Defense and Space Company, until 2014.

that passengers will get to enjoy when the BluesMobile enters service in mid-May.

As for the plane's name, Hayes admitted that he "didn't quite know how the naming thing was going to go."

JetBlue names all of its aircraft, starting with the very first BlueBird, with a moniker including the word "Blue," so the airline has had lots of practice.

"But this plane's name had to be something special, and Hayes indicated

that he was more than satisfied with BluesMobile.

"It's a living, breathing memory," Hayes said, "of the first Airbus plane built in the United States."

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What they said on historic day

There was a party atmosphere as industry executives, area dignitaries and workers turned out to mark the historic occasion of the first U.S.-built Airbus jetliner being delivered to a customer. It was a day filled with quotable quotes, and these are just a handful.

"It's great for the city. It's great for the state."

– **Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley**

"Watching the whole evolution, we heard all the projections. Airbus followed through on every step. Experience shows that they do deliver and the proof is what we see here today."

– **Mobile County Commissioner Connie Hudson**

"This has been so long in coming. Many a community would have divided, would have given up. But we didn't divide, and we didn't give up. This will become one of the very few aviation hubs in the world."

– **U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne**

"No company has ever had stronger local support than we've had here in Mobile."

– **Airbus Group, Inc. Chairman and CEO Allan McArtor**



Photo by Michelle R. Thomas

Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson greets a worker during Monday's delivery.

"To be in Germany when they loaded the passenger aircraft pieces onto the ship, the pieces that now everyone has touched, to watch it take its first flight, and now this, it's all very amazing. It feels like a sense of completion ... and getting a second wind."

– **Airbus delivery planning employee Laura McDonald**

"It's just a gratifying experience. Excitement is in the air. It bodes well for the future of Airbus and for the community."

– **Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson**

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