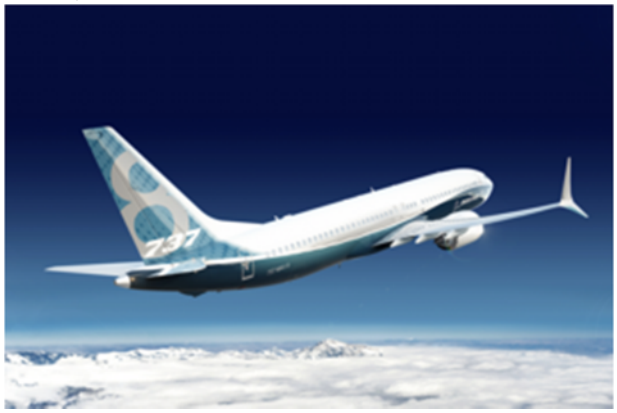
TRIANGLE
BUSINESS JOURNAL

The Boeing 737 MAX is getting new cockpit controls – thanks to a Cary company

Mar 9, 2018



The Boeing 737 MAX

A Cary company just scored a blockbuster deal – to develop new cockpit control devices for Boeing's fastest-selling jetliner: the Boeing 737 MAX. If all goes as expected, the modules Lord Corporation will build could start production in 2020 and assist commercial pilots around the globe.

Ed Auslander, CEO of Lord Corporation, says the magnitude of the win is hard to describe – but that it more than justifies the "back and forth" trips to Seattle and France to close the deal.

"Lord's been in business since 1924," he notes in an interview. "This year, we'll approach becoming a billion dollar company … We work with the biggest companies in the world that make aircraft, cars, trucks, trains, ships, rockets – and this contract is, by far, the biggest contract in our history."

Lord has been working with Boeing in some capacity for decades. This deal, however, ties it to Boeing's fastest-selling airplane, the Boeing 737 MAX, which has already – according to Boeing – accumulated more than 4,300 orders from 92 customers worldwide.

The device Lord is planning to deliver connects to a pilot's computer system to help him or her monitor the engine power.

"They won't notice anything different," he says. "How it connects to the pilot is the same as it's always been, but through a big collaboration with Boeing, we've been able to come up with an innovative solution that streamlines the design, makes it much simpler for Boeing to install in the aircraft, enabling them to save about eight man-hours in the assembly process."

It’s a big deal – one that’s already resulted in new engineering hires in France, where some of the assembly is taking place.

But it also promises to bolster Lord's Cary campus, where about 350 people work today. That’s because, in addition to the company’s administrative headquarters, Cary hosts a major research and development outfit for Lord.

Additionally, the contract validates a major acquisition made under Auslander’s tenure, that of French firm Fly-By-Wire in 2016. The company, which made cockpit actuation systems, was integrated into Lord's aerospace business with the goal of teaming up with Boeing to collaborate on products like this module. Auslander calls this the “signature win” that validates the initial gamble Lord took – not just with Fly-By-Wire, but its expanded aerospace strategy.

The deal could also lead to more contracts.

“We’ve already started further discussions with Boeing on other platforms,” he says. One-third of Lord's business is in aerospace, with the other two-thirds in automotive and industrial.

The ramifications of the win could be felt outside Lord. The presence of partners and suppliers puts states like North Carolina on the map for aerospace players looking for expansion sites, says New Jersey-based site consultant John Boyd.

Boyd, who has worked with firms like Boeing in the past, couldn’t directly comment on the situation. But he does say that, when firms like Boeing are looking at sites for manufacturing operations, proximity to supply chain partners becomes “critical.”

And aerospace expansions rank highly on North Carolina’s wish list, officials have said. Last year, North Carolina was named the fourth most attractive state in the country for aerospace manufacturing on PricewaterhouseCooper’s Aerospace Manufacturing Attractiveness Rankings – up a full 14 spots from the previous year.

As for the cockpit controls, 60 percent of the manufacturing will happen in France, with 40 percent taking place at a facility in Pennsylvania. Lord Corporation has 3,000 employees across the globe.

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