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Superjet Passenger Debut Set for Early 2011

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The Superjet 100 aircraft is expected to make its debut passenger flight early in 2011 before launching a major promotion drive in overseas markets, the head of its Russian parent said Tuesday.

The much-delayed plane will be the first newly designed civilian aircraft built by Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, and will try to challenge Canada's Bombardier and Brazil's Embraer in the regional carrier sector.

"We are finishing the certification process and will be sending planes to customers. We then plan to heavily promote Superjet in overseas markets," Mikhail Pogosyan, chief executive of state-controlled Sukhoi, told reporters.

"The first three planes for Aeroflot will arrive this year, but to use them regularly will take one to two months. The delays we have had are not as huge as the delays of some other companies," he said.

New plane delays have been endemic in the aero manufacturing industry in recent years. Boeing's 787 Dreamliner is on its sixth delay with more expected, while rival Airbus has toiled with its A400M military transport plane for years.

Superjet is 75 percent minus one share owned by Sukhoi with the balance controlled by Italy's Finmeccanica.

The groundbreaking civil project was originally penciled in for delivery in late 2008, but repeated engine trouble stalled it before a flurry of orders emerged at the Farnborough Airshow in July.

"We've done 1,000 flights and over 2,500 hours and the results show we are all set," Pogosyan said.

He said he was confident the Superjet 100, which carries around 100 passengers, could compete with established players Bombardier and Embraer as well as China's fledgling ARJ21 carrier.

"Embraer and Bombardier are recognized leaders but we can overcome mistrust of the quality level. ... We are quite confident our product is competitive and will not be shaken by competition from China," he said.

Overseas buyers for Superjet's 155 firm orders include Indonesia's Kartika and lessor Pearl.

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