



KLM'S BOEING 787 OFFERS NEW CABINS, CONNECTIVITY

News / Airlines, Manufacturer



As the latest airline to place **Boeing's 787** Dreamliner into service **KLM** had the opportunity to revisit its inflight product and set a new course for the airline. It has done precisely that, introducing new products for World Business Class, Economy Comfort (premium economy) and economy class. The products were put on display during a series of demo flights this past weekend over Holland; RGN was invited to experience the new product on one of these flights.

KLM chief operating officer René de Groot was on board the tour flights, hosting special guests and speaking with the media about the new products. He believes that the Boeing 787 is KLM's opportunity to "build on a future again" after several tough years financially and the new cabins are a big part of that plan. But he also acknowledges that the carrier's approach is a measured one, meant to be competitive in the market while not leaping to the forefront.

"We're not unique in everything but if you look at our business class, it's the last design that is there. It's new. Of course, I'm convinced that two years from now, there will be new technologies and new things. If you look at the business class now, it's really neat and beautiful too. We will serve our customers very well, very well with that. As well as the tourist class, if you look, we have bigger screens. We have more recline than we used to have."

The World Business Class cabin received the most significant upgrade, by far, on board. The new product, modified by Dutch designer Hella Jongerius, is a 1-2-1 herringbone layout with all seats offering direct aisle access and privacy. The 30-seat cabin is on par with other airlines vis-a-vis

seating density on the –9 variant of the 787. The published 42" pitch number belies the fully flat-bed at each seat.

Economy Comfort and economy receive upgrades in terms of bigger IFE screens and more recline, as de Groot noted. And, while some bemoan the 3-3-3 layout in economy on the 787, for KLM it was a measured choice.

Company VP of fleet services Peter Slobbe suggests that even with the narrower seats the additional pitch and recline offer "a very reasonable product" for passengers (Economy Comfort features a 35" pitch while economy is the increasingly industry standard of 31"). Ultimately it is a function of space versus density and one which Slobbe insists was well considered.

"Every choice we make in the interior is something you have to discuss...we made this choice and we'll have to see what the experience will be," he says. The carrier's 777s are 3-4-3 in economy, offering a similar seat width to the 3-3-3 Boeing 787 layout. With the new, larger IFE screen and greater pitch on seats – plus the atmospheric improvements the 787 offers – the Dreamliner may offer a better overall passenger experience than the 777.

The 787s are KLM's first sub-fleet to offer inflight connectivity. The carrier is taking the aircraft line-fit with Panasonic Avionics' Ku-band eXConnect system. Plans for the rest of the fleet remain uncertain at this time; de Groot believes that a decision will be made within a couple of years but was non-committal on specific details beyond that. In keeping with Panasonic's preferred pricing model the initial plans for the 787 will be two options, 40 megabytes for EUR 9.95 or 120 megabytes for EUR 19.95. A free portal product will offer information about the flight and destinations.

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25 NOVEMBER 2015

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