Smooth takeoff for new Boeing jet



TED S. WARREN / The Associated Press

Boeing Co. employees cheer as a Boeing Co. 787 airplane takes off on its first flight Tuesday at Paine Field in Everett, Wash.

First 787 test flight meets all expectations

By George Tibbits
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

EVERETT, Washington — Boeing's new 787 jetliner finally got airborne Tuesday, the long-delayed inaugural flight of the world's first commercial plane constructed with half its components made from lightweight composite materials.

The sleek jet, which will be manufactured in North Charleston and Seattle, lifted off from Everett's Paine Field on a flight over Washington state, beginning an extensive testing program needed to obtain Federal Aviation Administration certification.

"It's very historical. I can't think of a thing about it that I'm not impressed with," said Joe Bierce, a flight instructor for Delta Connection in Jacksonville, Florida, who was among the 25,000 people who gathered to watch the takeoff.

The two-member crew performed a variety of basic system checks before landing at Seattle's Boeing Field about three hours later. Deteriorating weather brought the plane back to earth about an hour earlier than planned, but company spokeswoman Lori Gunter said the pilots managed to test the landing gear and flaps.

Before takeoff, the aircraft paused for several minutes at the end of the runway while warming up its engines, adding to the tension for Boeing employees, customers and airline executives standing on the tarmac.

Although the runway was lined with fire trucks and other emergency vehicles, the first flight looked like a normal takeoff as the huge aircraft kicked up clouds of mist.

The plane is the first of six 787s Boeing will use in the nine-month flight-test program that will subject the planes to conditions well beyond those found in normal airline service.

Chicago-based Boeing, which has orders for 840 of the jets, plans to make the first delivery to Japan's All Nippon Airways late next year.

The 787 is a radical departure in aircraft design. Where other passenger jets are made mostly from aluminum and titanium, about half of the 787 is made of lightweight composite materials such as carbon fiber.