First South Carolina-built 787 takes maiden flight

By Bruce Smith
The Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON — South Carolina's burgeoning aeronautics industry flew by another milestone Wednesday as the first Boeing 787 manufactured in the state completed its maiden flight.

The first aircraft from Boeing's new $750 million assembly plant in North Charleston lifted gracefully into a hazy blue sky shortly after noon. It returned more than five hours later after clocking about 2,000 miles — mainly over the Atlantic — and flying to 41,000 feet.

Six Boeing employees were on board the white plane with a red tail stripe and hundreds of workers gathered around it as the aircraft returned from its first flight. The aircraft has been purchased by Air India and is to be delivered this summer.

By the end of this year, Boeing plans to have turned out four planes from its North Charleston plant. It hopes to be producing about three-and-a-half planes a month by the end of next year. The speedy, light aircraft are made partly from composite materials that include carbon fiber-reinforced plastic.

"We had a beautiful flight," said pilot Randy Neville, who also flew the first Boeing 787 built in Washington state.

About two dozen Boeing workers rode in cars and golf carts to the airport and stood in a grassy area by the runway as the plane took off.

About 6,000 Boeing workers turned out last month as the company held a rollout ceremony for the new jet. That event was attended by top Boeing execs and state, federal and local politicians. After the rollout, the engines were tested before Wednesday initial flight.

The next flight for the plane is to Texas for painting. Then it will fly with Air Indian representatives before the company takes delivery..