AIRBUS MAY LOSE A $5.3-BILLION ORDER — BUT IT'S NOT THEIR FAULT

News / Manufacturer

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In 2011, Airbus and Qatar Airways announced to great fanfare a 50-plane order for the new A320neo airliner.

Five years later, that deal could be jeopardy.

The Pratt & Whitney 1100G geared turbofans engines Qatar selected to power the planes are not up to Qatar's exacting standards, Bloomberg's Andrea Rothman reported.

According to Bloomberg, Qatar Airways CEO Akbar Al Baker told the press in Germany this week that his airline is at the point where they will either walkaway from the deal or select an alternative engine.

"While we don’t discuss the details of our talks with customers, we can say that we are working

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closely with Qatar Airways to agree on deliveries and we’re confident that with Pratt & Whitney’s support we will address any early learnings and meet our targets," Airbus said in a statement to Business Insider.

"The A320neo is already meeting its commitments regarding fuel burn, noise and weight."

At 2015 prices, the 50 A320neos are valued at roughly $5.3 billion, although it's likely Qatar negotiated a sizable wholesale discount.

The PW1100G engines are said to be experiencing uneven cooling, which leads to parts of the engine rubbing together, Bloomberg reported.

To alleviate these cooling problems, operators must run cool air through the engine for three minutes, Pratt & Whitney said in December.

However, Qatar Airways, which operates in an extreme Middle Eastern climate, is particularly wary of any potential overheating. Al Baker, who is known for his tough tactics, has also declined to take delivery of new airplanes for far less serious problems.

The A320neo, or "New Engine Option," is Airbus' next generation short/medium range airliner with upgraded aerodynamics, avionics and engines. The jet is supposed to deliver significantly improved range, acoustics, and fuel economy.

Much of the A320neo's magic comes from the two advanced engines options from CFM International and Pratt & Whitney.

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The Pratt & Whitney powerplant Qatar selected is considered to be one of the best new engines around. In fact, a variant of the geared turbofan engine can also be found on Bombardier's fuel-sipping C-Series airliner. Earlier this year, Delta Airlines CEO Richard Anderson praised the Pratt & Whitney engine's innovative technology.

Should Pratt not be able to come up with an acceptable fix in time, Qatar could opt for the CFM's highly acclaimed LEAP 1-A engine.

The Airbus A320neo quietly entered service in January with Germany's Lufthansa with the PW1100G engines. Although it should be noted that while Qatar's fleet spends much of its time in 100-plus degree desert heat, Lufthansa's A320neos tend to operate in more temperate locales.

Qatar Airways and Pratt & Whitney were not immediately available for comment.

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