



AIRBUS OFFERS OVERTIME TO WORKERS AS IT BATTLES TO GET A350 BACK ON TRACK

News / Manufacturer



As well as its wine and cheese, France is also famed for its traditional August month off, when much of the workforce simply shuts down and heads to the beach.

It's a brave – or perhaps desperate – company that's willing to challenge French workers' assumption that they get to spend a month en vacances but now Airbus, one of the country's most high-profile businesses, is taking a stand.

Rather than simply bid bon voyage to its staff at the start of August, the pan-European plane-maker has offered overtime to workers at its Toulouse base as it battles to get production of its new A350XWB airliner on track.

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The company has set itself a target of producing 50 of its twin-engine jets and is offering additional work to the 1,500 staff on the A350 production line as it hopes to take on rival Boeing's similar

sized 787 airliner, which came into service two years earlier.

Hitting production targets on the A350, which seats 270 to 370 passengers and starts at \$270m (£207m) for the smallest model, is crucial for Airbus after the programme ran into serious delays earlier this year.

Work fell behind after suppliers of cabin fittings and toilets let Airbus down. Chief executive Fabrice Bregier singled out subcontractor Zodiac as a major cause of delays, using Airbus's annual conference to publicly shame the company over its performance and saying it had been dropped as a supplier to another of company's jets.

Airbus boss Fabrice Bregier

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Aviation experts are eagerly watching output of the A350, with Airbus's own figures showing it delivered 15 in the year to the end of July, with unofficial sources saying another three had since rolled out of the Toulouse plant.

This means the company will have to significantly accelerate production rates to meet its target and avoid penalties for missing delivery slots.

"Airbus has made commitments to airlines and is pulling out all the stops so it doesn't face late delivery costs," said Howard Wheeldon, an independent aviation analyst. "Yes, overtime is an additional cost but it's probably cheaper than delivering a plane late."

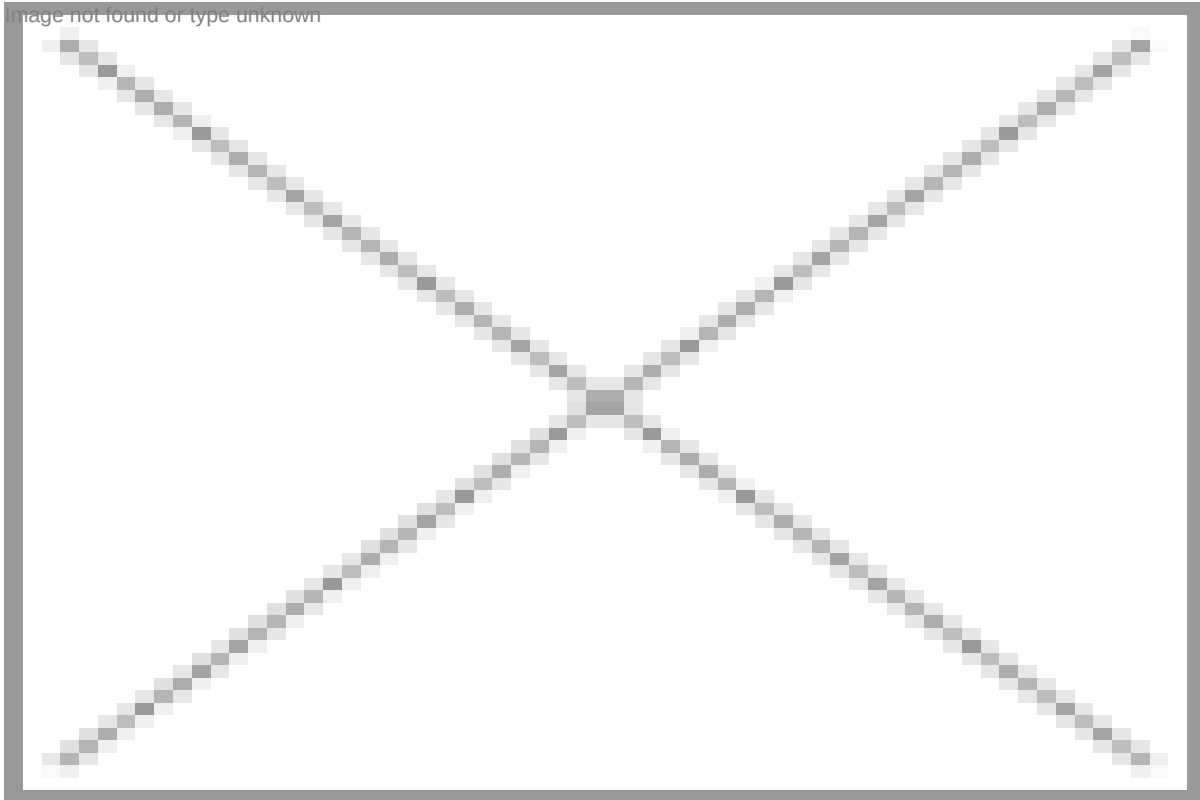
Saj Ahmad, analyst at Strategic Aero Research, added: "That Airbus is breaking its own norms by working through August points to desperation to get the A350 on track. There's only so much blame it can peddle to suppliers – if they were the true pacing item, then why bother building aeroplanes through the summer that could be missing parts?"

"It would be a disaster for Airbus to miss its 50-aircraft target. The costs of the A350 programme aren't coming down and delayed deliveries mean airlines seek compensation, so it's a doubly whammy."

Mr Ahmad added that if Airbus misses deliveries it could also drive customers to rival Boeing,

which is increasing the rate at which it produces competitors to the A350.

A spokesman for Airbus said: “We have set up a timetable adaptation plan for employees at the A350 final assembly line in Toulouse in order to maintain sufficient resources during the summer season and to support the manufacturing flow. This plan involves the introduction of overtime.”



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