

World's first Boeing 737-900 retires

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: Seattle-based carrier Alaska Airlines ferried the first-ever-produced Boeing 737-900 to Pinal Airpark in Arizona for retirement on April 8. The aircraft departed from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport at around 11:30.

The move comes amid efforts to erase the variant—considered the most important and beloved airframe in its fleet—from its operations.

The aircraft took to the skies for the first time nearly a quarter of a century ago, and soon it would have celebrated its 22nd anniversary with Alaska, if it did not retire.

According to reports, the aircraft recorded 67,909 flight hours across 27,560 flight cycles throughout its 22 years with Alaska. Now, the retirement is right on schedule—the minimum date being April 2025.

Before its retirement, N302AS spent its last day of revenue service

operating four legs on April 7. Across those flights, it visited San Francisco, Austin, Burbank, and finally Seattle.

The 737-900 started out as a rather lackluster program compared to other variants. It was announced in June 1997 as a competitor to the Airbus A321.

Due to the same emergency exit configuration as the -800, passenger capacity could not be exceeded beyond the maximum of 189 passengers. As such, only 52 airframes were ordered, according to reports.

The poor sales led Boeing to launch the more successful 737-900ER variant. With an extra pair of emergency exits, airlines had the option to configure the cabin to accommodate a maximum capacity of 215 passengers. Additionally, the plane could fly further with its increased range, which has proven to be favorable among many.

As the series prototype, Boeing used the 737-900 as a testbed. It performed its maiden flight, debuting as the largest 737 Next Generation variant on August 3, 2000.

N737X remained as the testbed until it was delivered to Alaska on April 29, 2003. However, following certification in Spring 2001, Boeing commenced series production and delivered airframes to Alaska, Continental Airlines, Korean Air, and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines that same year.

While the four operators of the aircraft type went on to retrofit their examples with blended winglets, Alaska kept the original straight wing design on a select few examples. It also sported its original over-cockpit windows, or “eyebrows,” which are no longer needed due to advancements in avionics.

The aircraft’s retirement leaves just four airframes left in the fleet. All are scheduled to be withdrawn from service this year, concluded reports.

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