

**Boeing caught in MAS mystery without jet wreckage to study
Malaysian Insider
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Boeing, the plane maker, is now involved in the mystery surrounding the disappearance of MH370. – The Malaysian Insider pic by Afif Abd Halim, March 11, 2014 American aircraft maker Boeing Co has found itself ensnared in the mystery over Malaysia Airlines lost B777-200ER as a team assisting the United States investigators confronts a central challenge in the case: There is no wreckage.

The B777, Boeing's current top-selling wide-body, has only been involved in one fatal accident in its 19-year history, Bloomberg said in a report today.

Malaysia Airlines' B777-200 (registration number 9M-MRO) had no major incidents in its past, according to FlightGlobal's Ascend Online database, although one wingtip was dislodged in a taxiway accident two years ago.

With no debris to help direct an accident probe and no reports of trouble before communications were lost, the plane remains among possible focal points for the inquiry into how flight MH370 vanished en route to Beijing on March 8 with 239 people on board, Bloomberg reported today.

That saddles Chicago-based Boeing with a negative association that may not lift until evidence is found to point the blame, said Robert Mann, an aviation consultant.

"I don't think we're going to know anything until anyone can find an airplane," said Mann, a former American Airlines executive who heads aviation consultant R.W. Mann & Co. of Port Washington, New York.

The lack of debris means the group of Boeing specialists sent to assist US National Transportation Safety Board investigators dispatched to Malaysia is limited in the help it can provide, John Purvis, a retired investigator who used to head accident probes for the planemaker, told Bloomberg.

Boeing technicians have assisted past inquiries into planes that vanished at sea by joining boat crews to help sort aircraft parts from other flotsam, said Purvis, a Seattle-based consultant who was involved in investigations of an Air India Boeing 747 blown up off the coast of Ireland in 1985 and Korean Air jet shot down by a Soviet jet fighter in 1983.

Unless pilots were able to glide to a water landing like the US Airways jet whose 2009 splashdown was dubbed the "Miracle on the Hudson," the missing plane would have "broken up badly," Purvis said. A nighttime ditching at sea would be even more challenging, and no debris has been found, the news agency said.

"If you hit the water in anything close to normal airplane speeds, it's just a lot of little pieces," Purvis said. "If it broke up in flight, it's the same way but scattered more widely."

Marc Birtel, a Boeing spokesman, said the company had no comment beyond a statement expressing "deepest concern" for relatives of those aboard Flight 370 and the dispatching of technical advisers to work with the NTSB.

Boeing fell the most on the Dow Jones Industrial Average yesterday, dropping 1.3% to \$126.89, amid questions about the Malaysian jet as well as a fresh setback for its 787 Dreamliner.

The planemaker is searching for hairline wing cracks on 43 undelivered jets, its marquee model and one whose history includes a commercial debut that ran more than three years late, the report said.

“News of the wing and inspections likely lower first-quarter deliveries, plus the 777 aircraft incident in Asia will likely weigh on the Boeing stock this week,” said Peter Arment, an analyst at Sterne, Agee & Leach Inc. in New York.

Boeing’s stock slide might have been steeper if not for the track record of the B777 during almost two decades in service, said George Ferguson, senior analyst for air transport with Bloomberg Industries. Deliveries total 1,178, according to Boeing’s website, and orders are sold out through 2016.

“The reputation of the airplane is so solid,” said David Greenberg, an aviation consultant and former operations executive at Delta Air Lines Inc. and Korean Air Lines Co.

Malaysia Airlines flies mostly Boeing aircraft, with the U.S. planemaker accounting for 70 of 96 jets. The B777-200 flown by Malaysian Air is out of production. The longer-range variants of that model retail for as much as \$296 million. Buyers typically get a discount.

Some B777s are programmed to automatically radio data about the engines and other equipment during flight. Those telemetry broadcasts include a plane’s location and that information was used to help find the Air France Airbus Group NV A330 that crashed in the Atlantic Ocean in 2009. Officials from Malaysian Air and Boeing have not said whether the plane had such equipment.

The only fatalities in a B777 accident occurred last year in the Asiana Airlines Inc. crash in San Francisco, where investigators have focused on pilot error. Only two other B777 accidents were serious enough to destroy a plane, the news report said.

The B777 is a favourite among airlines because the plane can carry more than 350 passengers in a three-class cabin, giving carriers first- and business-class seating as well as coach, and fly almost all the routes operated by four-engine jumbos.

Superlatives include its range – 7,725 nautical miles (14,305 kilometers) for the long-haul 777-200 – and the ability to put as many as 550 people in an all-economy cabin, according to Boeing’s website.

“If you’re Boeing, you want to find this airplane – you want to find out what happened because it just doesn’t help your reputation as an aircraft manufacturer,” Bloomberg Industries’ Ferguson said in a phone interview about the Malaysian jet. “For them, it’s probably a little bit excruciating”. – March 11, 2014.

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