February 21, 1979

Neil Armstrong Flies First Learjet 28 to 50,000 Feet In Little Over 12 Minutes At Historic Kill Devil Hills; Sets Altitude/Climb Records

Kitty Hawk, N.C. -- Here at the birthplace of aviation America's newest and most sophisticated business aircraft, the Learjet Longhorn 28, demonstrated the incredible progress in flying machines this week by climbing some 50,000 feet in a little over 12 minutes.

The new airplane, the first standard production model 28 to be built, took off from a strip called "First Flight" at nearby Kill Devil Hills, where on December 17, 1903, the Wright brothers achieved history's first powered flights, thus setting the stage for an American landing on the moon 66 years later.

Pilot in command of the new Learjet, appropriately enough, was former astronaut Neil A. Armstrong who, in accomplishing the landmark flights on February 19-20, 1979, established five new world records for business jets in two weight categories:

1. Altitude, and sustained altitude for business aircraft over 13,227 pounds gross weight -- 51,000 feet (two records).

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2. Altitude, and sustained altitude for business aircraft under 13,227 pounds gross weight -- 51,000 feet (two records).

3. Time to climb through 15,000 meters (FAI/NAA specified altitude level for record purposes) -- 12 minutes, 26 seconds.

The record flights further dramatized the remarkable vision of Wilbur Wright, co-inventor of the airplane, who in 1909 predicted that the future development of aviation would be in high altitude flying because of the more favorable atmospheric conditions provided by the upper air strata.

"We must get up clear of the belt of disturbed air which results from the irregularities of the earth's surface," Wilbur stated 70 years ago. "From now on you will see a great increase in the average elevation at which aviators will make their flights . . ."

Last December marked powered flight's 75th anniversary. In 1903 Orville flew first, 120 feet in 12 seconds. But in the fourth and last flight of the day, brother Wilbur covered a distance of 852 feet in 59 seconds, attaining heights of 12 to 14 feet and proving that man indeed had finally realized his age-old dream of emulating the birds.

Armstrong noted that during his climb the Longhorn reached 19,100 feet in the first three minutes, providing a spectacular contrast to those pioneering trials of the Wrights at this historic aviation shrine some 75 years earlier.

The record time would not have been possible without the refined high aspect ratio wing and winglets incorporated on the model 28. Gates Learjet's 28/29 series is the first production (more)
aircraft in the world to take advantage of winglets for increased high altitude performance.

Such high altitude performance in the rarified atmosphere increases fuel efficiency -- and normal operations up to 51,000 feet of altitude give the latest Learjet series more flexibility in flight planning for even greater performance advantages.

Learjets are the only business aircraft certificated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to fly at 51,000 feet. And other than the supersonic Concorde, no civil aircraft in the world flies as high.

Besides Armstrong, crew members on the record-setting Learjet Longhorn included copilot Peter T. Reynolds and official observer Don Berliner of the National Aeronautic Association (NAA), which sanctioned the attempt. NAA is the United States representative of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI), world authority governing international flight records.

Armstrong is an aeronautical engineering professor at the University of Cincinnati and a member of Gates Learjet Corporation's board of directors. He is also chairman of the company's technical committee.

Reynolds was project test pilot during development of the Learjet 28/29, which was FAA certificated in January. He was also the company's project pilot in gaining approval for Learjet flight at altitudes up to 51,000 feet.

The 28/29 has served in a developmental role supporting the company's new larger Learjet Longhorn "50" series aircraft (more)
featuring a standup, "walkaround" cabin. The first production prototype, a model 55, will fly this spring, certification is scheduled in 1980.

Previous Learjet "time-to-climb" records in two separate weight classes have not been broken by other business jets: They are:

1. Learjet 25 -- 12,000 meters (40,000 feet) in 6 minutes, 19 seconds, February 20, 1968.

2. Learjet 23 -- 12,000 meters in 7 minutes, 21 seconds (with seven occupants), December 14, 1965.

The company also holds numerous other world records for speed and distance, including sportsman pilot Arnold Palmer's 1976 globe-circling flight in a Learjet 36A, which he accomplished in 57 hours, 26 minutes total elapsed time (48 hours, 48 minutes flying time).

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