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UPS, Freight Companies Love Newest Version Of Boeing's Oldest Plane, The 747 8F



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Travel



United Parcel Service (UPS) Boeing 747 8F in flight. © 2017 CHAD SLATTERY

The 747 is quickly flying away from passenger service. But is the era of the four-engine jumbo jet really dead? Not if you like to get everything from high-value fish to higher-valued COVID-19 vaccine delivered.

Just in time for the holidays, UPS got its own eagerly-anticipated package—a brand new 747 8F freighter. On December 14, the [\\$419 million dollar plane](#) was ferried from the Boeing plant and airfield in Everett, Washington to its new UPS home at Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport, where UPS has its largest air-sorting hub, WorldPort. The new plane is the 20th 747 8F to be delivered to UPS, part of a total of 28 aircraft ordered by the cargo carrier.

Freighters were always considered a backwater of the aviation industry. But with the COVID-19 epidemic and thousands of passenger airliners sidelined, the 747-8F freighter provides a lot more than a last gasp for the 51-year-old ‘queen of the skies.’

In fact, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) **claimed** that transporting enough COVID-19 vaccine for 8 billion people would take 8,000 747 freighters, 20 times the number **actually built**. Fortunately, Professor Anna Nagurney, a mathematician and logistics expert at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, **says** the belly freight carried by airliners when the airline industry was running full-steam, plus dedicated cargo craft, can probably handle the load, “Since pre-pandemic there were about 100K flights per day, the capacity appears to be sufficient.”

At least 747 freighter models were designed and built. They are currently keeping Boeing’s production line of the aging plane going **through 2022**. The much newer Airbus A380 will end production in 2021. The failure of Airbus to produce a freighter due to production delays, along with the plane’s high cost of operations (and its 500 seats to fill) are all parts of the reason why.

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Rare 2004 photo-image of EADS Airbus' A380F freighter. A380F was planned to carry a 150 tonnes over ... [+] 2004 AFP

Although the trend for passenger craft has switched to more efficient twin-jets, there are some things big four-engine freighters can do that their smaller brethren cannot. [Boeing](#) is currently selling three freighter aircraft. The Boeing 767F, a freighter version of Boeing's aging twin jet, can carry 52,480 kg (115,700 lbs.) of cargo up to 3,255 nautical miles. The Boeing 777F, a freighter version of Boeing's popular intercontinental widebody, can lift a total of 102,010 kg (224,900 lbs.) and carry it 4,970 nm.

But the 747-8F remains the heavyweight champ. It has a payload of 137.7 metric tons (303,700 lbs.) and the space to carry 46 containers. The aircraft's four GE turbofans, each providing 66,500 pound-force, push it along at up to 530 knots, with a range of up to 4,120 nautical miles. That's a lot of videogame systems, Christmas presents, high-value food products—or the most valuable commodity of all right now, coronavirus vaccine.

UPS, a key delivery component of Operation Warp Speed, the worldwide effort to [distribute the new COVID-19](#) vaccines, clearly remains a fan of Boeing's legendary giant.



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UPS has a fleet larger than many airlines (over 500 [owned and leased](#) aircraft). It is [not retiring](#) 747-400 model freighters as the 747 8F, which Boeing [calls](#) “the world's most efficient freighter,” continues to arrive. For UPS, the plane may prove more popular in the communities in which it operates as well, as the 747 8F is [said to be 30% quieter](#) than the 747-400.

Boeing says the 747 8F “has more capacity than any airplane in production today and offers greater efficiency (low tonne-kilometer cost) enabled by new technology: new wings, engines and flight deck.” And the 747-8 Freighter is the only new freight aircraft with its distinctive nose door, “allowing outsized cargo and improved turnaround time.”

The 747 8F is helping meet demand in 2020, which air cargo database company WorldACD [called](#) the “craziest half year in air cargo.” Why so crazy? Despite a decrease in capacity and global demand, [there was](#) “a staggering jump in the worldwide average air freight revenue in the last half-year by 21%.” UPS was a major beneficiary, increasing its net income by almost \$2 billion in the second quarter of 2020 alone.

Of course, the 747-8, as part of that world freight revenue increase, may have been more profitable for freighter customers like UPS than it was for Boeing. It has been [reported](#) that Boeing lost about \$40 million per delivery of the Boeing 747-8, and the company took \$4.2 billion of total charges related to the program.

Although the world cargo demand seems voracious, it looks like production of the venerable 747 will indeed end in 2022. UPS will be among the last customers to receive a

new 747. But the plane will continue to play a role in carrying the world's most important cargo for years to come.



Package containers sit near a Boeing Co. 747-8 jet on the tarmac at the United Parcel Service Inc. ... [+] © 2018 BLOOMBERG FINANCE LP

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