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GE exec says avoided geared design in jet engine battle with Pratt

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Sept 15 (Reuters) - General Electric Co <GE.N> avoided using a geared design for its new engine for narrowbody jets because of concerns about weight and reliability, said a top GE executive on Monday as it battles with rival Pratt & Whitney for billions of dollars in engine orders.

Pratt, part of United Technologies Corp <UTX.N>, developed a geared turbofan that relies on a gearbox and lets the front fan operate at a different speed than the rest of the engine, while on GE's traditionally configured engines the fans run at the same speed.

Speaking at a Morgan Stanley investor conference, GE Chief Technology Officer Mark Little said the company had "considered a geared approach ... and we chose very consciously not to take that approach."

"Some other application someday, maybe, but not for this one," Little said at the conference in Dana Point, California, that was broadcast over the Internet.

Through its joint venture called CFM with France's Safran <SAF.PA>, GE is competing against Pratt for airline and other customers that choose Airbus' <AIR.PA> new A320neo single-aisle plane. Both engines promise significant fuel savings over older models, and Airbus buyers can choose the Pratt or CFM engine.

CFM's LEAP, among other improvements, uses new materials designed to reduce weight and add durability.

"We thought that the addition of the extra component would add reliability and weight challenges, and durability challenges that we could avoid by going the path we went," Little said.

"We like the bet that we've made," Little said.

In response to Little's comments, Pratt & Whitney spokeswoman Sara Banda said: "We are confident in our PurePower Geared Turbofan engine technology and this is not just us saying this," noting that in addition to Airbus, four other aircraft makers have selected the GTF, including Embraer <EMBR3.SA> and Bombardier Inc <BBD.B.TO>.

Pratt has completed more than 10,000 hours of testing for the GTF engine family, Banda said in an email, after 20 years of research and \$1 billion invested into developing the engine.

Barry Eccleston, president of Airbus Americas Inc, told the Reuters Aerospace and Defense summit last week that of A320neo customers, so far about one-third have chosen the LEAP, one-third have selected the GTF, while one-third remain undecided.

Pratt has had a smaller presence among commercial engines in recent years, so the GTF engine is its bid to return to prominence. By contrast, CFM has been the dominant engine on the narrowbody planes, including capturing a major portion of the new narrow-body market because it is the sole engine on Boeing Co's <BA.N> 737 MAX.

The geared engine architecture won a vote of confidence in February, when Rolls-Royce Holdings Plc <RR.L> also said it was pursuing such an approach for its future engines.

Airbus has said the first A320neo flight, which will use Pratt's GTF engine, is expected sometime this month.

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---- **Index References** ----

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