

737'S AT ASPEN – MYTH VERSUS REALITY

CAN THEY FLY HERE? WILL THEY FLY HERE?

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N737MT
















N737MT, a private version of the 737-500 series, has been flying into ASE for years, including five times in July 2024.

This is from an older nosier generation, permitted to fly into ASE because it fits within the 95' wingspan restriction. Apparently, very few ever noticed.














The 737 is not a specific aircraft type, but a large family of 13 unique aircraft relatives spanning four generations.

FOUR GENERATIONS OF BOEING 737s				
Size	Original (1968 – 1988)	Classic (1984 – 2000)	NextGen (NG) (1997 – 2020)	MAX (2017 – Future)
S	737-100 	737-500 	737-600 	737 MAX-7 
M	737-200 	737-300 	737-700 	737 MAX-8 
L		737-400 	737-800 	737 MAX-9 
XL			737-900/900ER 	737 MAX-10 














The noisiest 737s ever flown were also the oldest, and the smallest. Newer generation 737s have all become bigger and quieter.

FOUR GENERATIONS OF BOEING 737s				
Size	Original (1968 – 1988)	Classic (1984 – 2000)	NextGen (NG) (1997 – 2020)	MAX (2017 – Future)
S	737-100 	737-500 	737-600 	737 MAX-7 
	 Bigger			
M	737-200 	737-300 	737-700 	737 MAX-8 
	 Quieter			
L		737-400 	737-800 	737 MAX-9 
XL			737-900/900ER 	737 MAX-10 














Six models of the original and classic generation 737's will never fly to ASE because they are no longer flown commercially in North America.

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Five models of the now aging NG and the new MAX generation 737's will never fly to ASE because they are too heavy. They've never been considered for Eagle or Jackson Hole, let alone Aspen... and never will.

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This leaves the 737-700 from the NG generation, and the yet to be certified 737 Max-7 generation currently in production, as the only two models out of 13 produced by Boeing for commercial flights that could ever possibly be capable of flying in & out of ASE.

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Boeing 737 Economics

Smaller = Better Hot & High Operational Performance, but Poor Operational Performance and Increased Emissions per Passenger

Bigger = Weaker Operational Performance, but Improved Economics and Reduced Emissions per Passenger



737-600: Had the best hot & high performance, but the worst economics. Canada's WestJet once operated a small fleet of just thirteen -600s but retired them all in favor of the -700s.



737-700: Offered a reasonable compromise of performance versus economics, thus the reason it became popular with U.S. Airlines.



737 MAX-9: Now the largest 737 model currently in production offering exceptional economics, but like all larger models, it lacks the performance to fly out of any mountain airport – not Jackson Hole, not Eagle County, and certainly not Aspen/Pitkin County.

Boeing 737-700s Close-Up: How Many Are Really Left?

During the 16-month long ASE Vision process, the 737-700 with winglets is the *only in-service model* of the 737-family identified by the Technical Working Group that could be *marginally compatible* with ASE's required procedures but would likely be forced to operated with a *significant weight penalty* at ASE.

As the first variant of Boeing's Next Generation (NG) series, many 737-700s have already been retired. Those that remain in service at five North American airlines are now 18-25 years old* and are facing imminent retirement.



Alaska Airlines:

In Service: 13

Parked: 1

Historic: 8

Total: 22

Avg, Age: 24.2 Years



Avelo Air:

In Service: 8

Parked: 0

Historic: 0

Total: 8

Avg, Age: 18.3 Years



Southwest Airlines:

In Service: 359

Parked: 16

Historic: 139

Total: 514

Avg. Age: 18.9 Years



United Airlines:

In Service: 40

Parked: 0

Historic: 13

Total: 53

Avg. Age: 25.4 Years



WestJet:

In Service: 37

Parked: 1

Historic: 31

Total: 69

Avg. Age: 18.1 Years

* All data listed above according to Planespotters.net as of June 2024

Boeing 737-700s Close-Up: Operational Considerations

Strong “Hot & High” aircraft performance is an important consideration of any aircraft operating at ASE because of the airport’s unique attributes.

High Airport Elevation

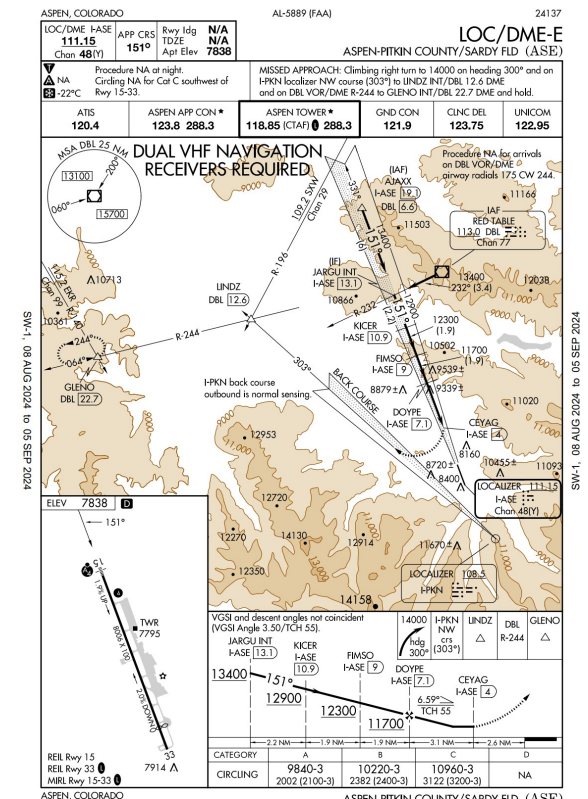
Creates performance limitations on all aircraft, requiring reductions in payload (fuel, passengers, baggage, or oftentimes a combination of all the above).

Surrounding Terrain

Require special procedures to ensure terrain clearance, often requiring that aircraft be capable of a minimum climb gradient to safely execute said procedures.

Combined Impacts

Passenger limits reduce flight profitability; lower fuel loads limits range. The combined impacts on 737-700 flights from ASE would be severe according to several highly experienced pilots from different airline operators.



Boeing 737-700s Close-Up: Practical Considerations

Knowing that 737-700s are expected to operate with large performance penalties from ASE and likely to be able to reach Denver only, who of the remaining five North American operators might really consider operating them at ASE?



Alaska Airlines: Just announced new nonstop flights into Eagle County (EGE) from both Seattle (SEA) and San Diego (SAN) starting December 20, 2024. The 737-700 was considered, but it was determined that the Embraer E175 (to be flown by SkyWest) would perform better. If their 737-700s would be too restricted to fly out of EGE, there's no way they would fly them from ASE.



Avelo Air: ULCC upstart Avelo operates a fleet of 19 737NGs, eight of which are 737-700 in a high-density all coach configuration of 149 seats. Most are based out of their base in Burbank (BUR), while at least one is based in New Haven (HVN). There is



Southwest Airlines: The only conceivable route that is even possible from a practical perspective with a current North American operator of the 737-700 is Southwest Airlines to DEN. Based on the poor financial performance from DEN to two other Colorado resort markets launched in 2020, it is extremely unlikely if not impossible that Southwest would consider a new Colorado ski route.



United Airlines: Currently uses the 737-700 to fly between EGE and both Chicago (ORD) and Houston (IAH). The E175 is now being used for all United flights between EGE and Denver, Los Angeles and San Francisco. The E175 has also now been revealed as United's preferred future aircraft for ASE (also to be flown by SkyWest). United has no interest in flying 25-year-old 737-700s into ASE.



WestJet: Based in Calgary, Alberta (YYC) from which WestJet operates a substantial network of sometimes less than daily flights to a variety of leisure destinations, including Mexico, the 892-mile stage length flight from ASE-YYC would be way beyond the capability of their 737-700s, even if substantially weight restricted.

Southwest Airlines Case Study: Hayden and Montrose

- Southwest launched service into both Hayden (HDN) and Montrose (MTJ) from Denver (DEN) in late 2020, initially offering three flights daily to each, followed by service into Colorado Springs (COS) and Bozeman (BZN) in 2021.
- After three years of disappointing results, service was reduced to ~two daily last winter, and last week Southwest further reduced their January 2025 schedules to barely one flight daily to both HDN & MTJ from DEN.
- Southwest is under tremendous pressure to reduce unprofitable flying, and these two routes are among Southwest's most unprofitable routes from DEN as illustrated by the Route Grader Table to the right.
- With Southwest's mostly unsuccessful ski city experiment at both HDN & MTJ, and marginal performance at BZN and COS, it is extremely unlikely if not impossible that they would ever consider another ski city from Denver.

Route Grader Report for WN flights to DEN for 12 Select Route for travel YE Q4 2023							
Orig	Dest	Miles	Depts/Day	Load Factor	Lcl %	SLA TRASM*	Hub Rank
ALB	DEN	1,609	0.4	92	46.9	14.63	#1 out of 80
BWI	DEN	1,491	4.9	88	53.0	13.55	#3 out of 80
TUS	DEN	639	2.9	84	40.8	13.08	#8 out of 80
RNO	DEN	804	2.6	86	27.4	12.46	#17 out of 80
SLC	DEN	391	7.6	74	36.2	11.34	#45 out of 80
PSP	DEN	776	1.3	81	37.6	11.00	#52 out of 80
BZN	DEN	525	3.6	80	16.8	10.03	#69 out of 80
COS	DEN	72	3.9	74	0.6	9.52	#73 out of 80
SBA	DEN	916	1.2	72	54.9	9.50	#74 out of 80
MTJ	DEN	197	1.7	68	12.0	9.23	#75 out of 80
HDN	DEN	142	1.6	66	4.7	8.72	#78 out of 80
AMA	DEN	358	1.1	49	29.6	7.35	#80 out of 80

* SLA TRASM stands for Stage-Length Adjusted Total Revenue per Available seat mile, an industry standard measure of route profitability.

What about the Boeing 737 MAX-7?



The 737 MAX-7 is another variant identified during the ASE Vision process as a future model that could potentially operate at ASE if allowed to do so.

- The Max-7 is the smallest variant of the newest generation 737s to be built by Boeing, but it is still awaiting FAA certification.
- While powered by more powerful yet quieter LEAP engines, the Max-7 is nearly 15% heavier than the 737-700, and it too would be unable to operate out of ASE without significant weight restrictions, just like the 737-700.
- Southwest Airlines is the only U.S. carrier to have placed an order for this model, and for reasons articulated in the previous slide, it is extremely unlikely they would ever use it to serve ASE even if they could.

What about the Boeing Business Jet (BBJ)?

- The first BBJ, based on the 737-700 NG, was introduced in 1998. BBJs were initially operated by Fortune 100 companies. However, the 2008 recession put ultra-large jets under scrutiny, and they were divested by many companies.
- Most BBJs today are operated by governments for VIP transport in the U.S., Australia and Africa, or Middle East oil barons like Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Saudi Arabia royalty. These users don't exactly fit the visitor profile of guests to Aspen Snowmass.



CONCLUSION: It's Virtually Impossible that any Modern 737s Will Ever Operate at ASE, Commercial or Private.

Just because the runway dimensions would allow larger aircraft like the 737-700 to operate at ASE does not mean the airlines would choose to fly a larger, less efficient aircraft to serve the market when a far superior option now exists. There is simply no business case for any airline to consider operating any modern 737's at ASE. It is therefore virtually impossible that any airline could ever choose to operate 737s into ASE, regardless of the size of the runway.

Rebuilding the runway at ASE is now imperative because of its failing condition, and the #1 reason the FAA is insisting on it being built to current standards is for SAFETY. No one has ever heard from any of the 123 citizens who participated in the 16-month long ASE Vision process that the reason is to accommodate larger aircraft. Ironically, the only local groups that are claiming we need a wider runway for bigger planes are Aspen Fly Right and CITIZENS AGAINST BIGGER PLANES!

