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Airbus A380 becomes first commercial jet to fly on alternative fuel

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FILTON: An Airbus A380, the world's largest passenger jet, became the first commercial plane to be powered by alternative fuel on a test flight on Friday, the planemaker said.

The superjumbo took off from Filton, England on a three-hour test flight to Airbus' headquarters in Toulouse, France, powered on a blend of regular fuel and liquid fuel processed from gas.

The airline industry is coming under pressure to find ways to reduce its carbon emissions and tackle fuel costs. Airbus' test comes as rival planemaker Boeing Co. and Virgin Atlantic prepare to test a 747 with biofuel during a demonstration flight from London to Amsterdam, Netherlands, next month.

Airbus head of alternative fuels research, Sebastien Remy, said he hopes that around 25 percent of fuel will come from alternative sources by 2025.

The company is testing gas to liquid, or GTL, for benefits in terms of air quality and fuel burn compared with existing jet fuels. GTL is virtually sulfur free.

It also sets the groundwork for the development of other alternative fuels, such as liquid fuel from biomass organic material made from plants such as algae, he said.

The tests are part of an agreement with Qatar Airways, Rolls Royce, whose Trent 900 engines power the A380, and Shell International Petroleum, which provides the GTL jet fuel.

Stephen Vella, a management adviser at Qatar Airways, said his airline hopes to start making modest use of GTL next year.