

SOFIA Fun Facts for Reporters

SOFIA is a highly modified Boeing 747SP airliner.

SP stands for “Special Performance” – shorter fuselage, thus able to carry less, but with the same fuel capacity as a larger 747, thus greater range.

The SP is 48 feet, 4 inches shorter than a standard 747.

Height to the top of the tail is 65 feet, 5 inches.

A typical 747SP seats 232 passengers versus 624 seats on a 747-400.

Only 45 747SP jetliners were built.

As of June 2014, Boeing has built more than 1,500 747s of all models.

SOFIA flies at Mach .85, or 540 mph, or 9 miles a minute.

SOFIA is equipped with 4 x Pratt & Whitney JT9D-7J turbofan engines, each developing 50,000 pounds of thrust.

SOFIA has a range of 6,625 nautical miles (non-stop New York to Kuwait City, Kuwait).

The aircraft that would later become SOFIA first flew on April 25, 1977, and was delivered to Pan American World Airways on May 6, 1977.

- This aircraft was christened Clipper Lindbergh by Anne Morrow Lindbergh on May 20, 1977 – the 50th Anniversary of Charles A. Lindbergh’s solo flight across the Atlantic.
- SOFIA was rechristened Clipper Lindbergh by Erik Lindbergh, grandson of Charles and Anne, on May 21, 2007.

SOFIA’s telescope was built in Germany by MAN Technologie AG and Kayser-Threde GmbH.

Telescope Diameter: 2.7 meters (106 inches)

Usable telescope diameter (known as unvignetted diameter): 2.5 meters (98 inches)

Telescope Installation Weight: 15,420 kg (17 tons or 34,000 pounds)

SOFIA’s first 100-percent open door flight was Dec. 18, 2009.

SOFIA’s “First Light” Flight was May 25/26, 2010.

SOFIA’s first science targets were Jupiter and the Messier 82 (M82) galaxy.