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Navy Variant of Lockheed Martin JSF Takes Flight

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The United States Navy version of the Lockheed Martin Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) demonstrator took to the skies on Saturday, Dec. 16, initiating a flight-test program that will focus on carrier-suitable flying qualities and aircraft performance.

At 9:23 a.m. PST, test pilot Joe Sweeney launched the X-35C carrier variant (CV) from the Lockheed Martin Aeronautics plant in Palmdale, Calif., and flew the plane for 27 minutes before touching down at Edwards Air Force Base. The aircraft climbed to 10,000 feet and accelerated to 250 knots (288 miles per hour). Sweeney, a former Navy attack pilot, cycled the landing gear and performed aircraft flying-qualities evaluations including rolls, sideslips and overall systems checks.

"As a former Naval aviator I'm picky about the airplanes the U.S. Navy operates. From the moment the wheels of the X-35C left the ground I felt right at home in the cockpit of our Navy demonstrator," Sweeney said. "The precision and ease with which the airplane handles and the performance that was evident gives me great confidence that the X-35 will demonstrate our team's ability to meet the Navy's carrier suitability requirements."

While the Navy variant is similar to the X-35A, which completed testing in November, the X-35C has special characteristics to meet the demanding requirements of carrier operations, with no compromise. Its specifications include a larger wing and control surfaces, the addition of ailerons and a special structure to absorb high-impact landings.

"We want to ensure that the Navy has the very best strike fighter in its history -- one that won't cost them an arm and a leg to maintain -- and we strongly believe this is it," said Tom Burbage, executive vice president and general manager of the Lockheed Martin JSF program, and a former Navy pilot. "The Lockheed Martin JSF Navy variant will provide the first carrier-supportable VLO (very low observable "stealth"), achieve first-look, first-shot air supremacy and enhance Navy war-fighter capabilities with breakthrough, all-weather precision strike. Our X-35C is highly representative of the aircraft we've planned for production, so its in-flight behavior will be an extremely accurate predictor of the production airplane's flight characteristics. That will lower development costs, save taxpayer dollars and reduce technical risk."

The X-35C's flight-test program will include a series of field carrier landing practice (FCLP) tests to evaluate the aircraft's handling qualities and performance during carrier approaches and landings at an airfield. Also planned are up-and-away handling-quality tests and engine transients at varying speeds and altitudes.

The X-35C is the second Lockheed Martin JSF demonstrator to undergo flight-testing. The X-35A conventional-takeoff-and-landing (CTOL) variant, designed for U.S. Air Force use, successfully completed its flight-test program on Nov. 22.

"It is rare for a flight-test program to test two different aerodynamically configured aircraft in such a short span," said Dick Burton, flight-test director for the Lockheed Martin X-35 program. "We are pumped up to show the superior carrier-suitability characteristics of JSF in the X-35C."

A third JSF variant, the lift fan-equipped X-35B, is scheduled to begin vertical-flight testing next spring.

The Lockheed Martin-Northrop Grumman-BAE SYSTEMS team brings to the JSF program a heritage of more than half a dozen highly successful naval aircraft over 60 years.

"The first flight of the X-35 was certainly gratifying to the entire team," said Duke Dufresne, Northrop Grumman vice president and JSF program manager. "We look forward to applying our years of experience in the development of naval fighter aircraft as part of Northrop Grumman's contributions to the Lockheed Martin JSF team."

The Lockheed Martin JSF team is in competition to build the JSF for the United States and United Kingdom. Government selection of a single contractor for the Engineering and Manufacturing Development phase is set for 2001.

For corresponding photos, visit http://www.lmaeronautics.com/image_gallery/pr_photos/jsfpr_photos/jsf_1stfligh t/index_6.html

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For government information on the Joint Strike Fighter program, visithttp://www.jast.mil/

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