First Marine Corps Pilot Hovers In JSF X-35B; An Aviator's 'Dream'

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The U.S. Marine Corps today got its first pilot evaluation of the Lockheed Martin Joint Strike Fighter's vertical takeoff, hover and vertical landing performance.

Maj. Art "Turbo" Tomassetti became the first Marine and only the second pilot to fly the short-takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) X-35B, which is demonstrating JSF requirements for the Marines and the United Kingdom Royal Air Force/Royal Navy. With today's flight, Tomassetti also becomes the first pilot to have flown all three X-35 variants: the X-35A, X-35B and X-35C.

"On a hot day in the high desert, the X-35B demonstrated the kind of vertical performance that Harrier pilots dream about," said Tomassetti, a Harrier pilot who also serves as X-35 test pilot for the Marine Corps. "With my three press-ups today I am convinced that we are on the right track.

"No matter how many times you do it, hovering a jet airplane always feels a little magical, and today was no exception. My compliments to the entire team for putting together a very nice hovering machine."

Tom Burbage, executive vice president and general manager of the Lockheed Martin JSF program, characterized Tomassetti's flight as a milestone.

"Getting a U.S. Marine in the X-35B's cockpit represents a critical step forward in our flight test program, because this is the airplane Marine pilots will rely upon in the future," Burbage said. "As we saw today, the X-35B continues to demonstrate phenomenal lifting power in unfavorable conditions: 2,500-foot high-desert elevation with temperatures above 80 degrees Fahrenheit. And the airplane is incredibly stable."

A Royal Air Force pilot is scheduled to fly the aircraft over the weekend.

The X-35B made its first vertical takeoff and vertical landing on June 23, and since then has hovered numerous times at up to 50 feet above the ground.

Upcoming milestones include a flight to Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., where the plane will transition from conventional flight to hover, and will execute short takeoffs and vertical landings. As configured, the aircraft is ready for supersonic flight.

The X-35B features a unique propulsion system in which a drive shaft from the Pratt & Whitney JSF119-611 engine turns a counterrotating lift fan that produces cool-air lifting force during STOVL operations. The Rolls-Royce fan, actuated by a clutch that can be engaged at any power setting, works in concert with an articulating rear duct and under-wing lateral-control nozzles to generate nearly 40,000 pounds of lifting power.

The Lockheed Martin team approach to the STOVL flight-test program is based on fielding and flying a demonstrator that solves the marginal thrust levels associated with direct-lift STOVL aircraft, so that both technical risk and cost are reduced before the JSF's production phase.

Advanced manufacturing methods already demonstrated by the Lockheed Martin JSF team will reduce manufacturing time by 66 percent and manufacturing costs by more than 50 percent over legacy fighter aircraft.

Lockheed Martin, in partnership with Northrop Grumman and BAE SYSTEMS, 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 fall 2001.

For photos and information on the JSF, visit: http://www.lmaeronautics.com/

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

For information on Lockheed Martin Corporation , visit: http://www.lockheedmartin.com

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