

Lockheed Martin F-35 Team On Track For Final-Assembly Start In Late Spring

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FORT WORTH, Texas and PALMDALE, Calif. and SAMLESBURY, England

The four major subassemblies for the first F-35 Joint Strike Fighter are taking shape as the program progresses toward final assembly in late spring at Lockheed Martin in Fort Worth.

"Our team's investment in cutting-edge manufacturing equipment, and its dedication to the latest and best thinking in production processes already are paying dividends in terms of assembly precision, quality and efficiency," said Bob Elrod, Lockheed Martin F-35 JSF program general manager. "This commitment will further prove its worth through reduced costs and speedier manufacturing. Even at this early stage, a glance across the factory floors of Samlesbury, Palmdale and Fort Worth shows the emergence of a new kind of aircraft."

The Northrop Grumman-built center fuselage and the BAE Systems-built aft- fuselage and tails will be shipped respectively from Palmdale and Samlesbury to Fort Worth in the second quarter of 2005, where they will be joined with the Lockheed Martin-built wing and forward fuselage. Assembly of the initial F-35A conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) variant is expected to be completed at the end of the year. First flight is planned for August 2006.

The F-35 is a next-generation, supersonic, multi-role stealth aircraft designed to replace the AV-8B Harrier, A-10, F-16, F/A-18 Hornet and the United Kingdom's Harrier GR.7 and Sea Harrier.

Northrop Grumman started assembly of the F-35A center fuselage in February 2004, beginning with the fabrication of the composite duct assemblies. Now, a year later, the company is completing the major mate of the center-fuselage upper and lower assemblies, and has begun hydraulic-, fuel- and electrical-systems installations. "We continue to reinforce our commitment to build an affordable strike fighter with formidable next- generation capabilities, and we're absolutely on course for that goal," said Janis Pamiljans, F-35 program manager for Northrop Grumman.

On Jan. 31 at BAE Systems in Samlesbury, the F-35 aft fuselage marked a major on-time achievement with the machining of the first production assembly of the left-hand boom. All the structural components of the vertical tail are loaded in the assembly tool and will begin machining shortly. Horizontal-tail assembly will start in the near future. F-35 machining techniques will set new standards for assembly pace and precision, ensuring that the F-35's outer shape is exact and meets its low-observability (stealth) requirements. BAE Systems' JSF Program Director Michael Christie said, "Techniques used in the machining of this first production component will fall within seven- thousandths of an inch -- less than the width of a human hair."

At Lockheed Martin in Fort Worth, workers have completed the initial attachment of composite skins to the forward fuselage, installed the cockpit floor, and have begun electrical-systems installation. Assembly of the wing structure is complete, and the lower composite skins were recently attached for drilling.

Manufacturing planning is currently in work for the first F-35B short takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) variant in preparation for fabrication activities. At Northrop Grumman, assembly operations for the F-35B center fuselage are scheduled to start in the second quarter of 2005. Lockheed Martin will begin F-35B assembly in the fourth quarter of this year, and BAE Systems will start assembling F-35B components in early 2006.

Three versions of the F-35 -- a CTOL, STOVL and carrier variant (CV) -- each derived from a common design, will ensure that the F-35 meets the performance needs of the U.S. Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, the U.K. Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, and allied defense forces worldwide, while staying within strict affordability targets.

Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., a business area of Lockheed Martin, is a leader in the design, research and development, systems integration, production and support of advanced military aircraft and related technologies. Its customers include the military services of the United States and allied countries throughout the world. Products include the F-16, F/A-22, F-35 JSF, F-117, C-5, C-130, C-130J, P-3, S-3 and U-2. The company produces major components for the F-2 fighter, and is a co-developer of the C-27J tactical transport and T-50 advanced jet trainer. Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 130,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture and integration of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2004 sales of \$35.5 billion.

Northrop Grumman Corporation is a global defense company headquartered in Los Angeles, Calif. Northrop Grumman provides technologically advanced, innovative products, services and solutions in systems integration, defense electronics, information technology, advanced aircraft, shipbuilding and space technology. With more than 125,000 employees, and operations in all 50 states and 25 countries, Northrop Grumman serves U.S. and international military, government and commercial customers.

BAE Systems is an international company engaged in the development, delivery and support of advanced defense and aerospace systems in the air, on land, at sea and in space. The company designs, manufactures and supports military aircraft, surface ships, submarines, radar, avionics, communications, electronics and guided weapon systems. It is a pioneer in technology with a heritage stretching back hundreds of years. It is at the forefront of innovation, working to develop the next generation of intelligent defense systems. BAE Systems has major operations across five continents and customers in some 130 countries. The company has more than 90,000 people and generates annual sales of approximately 12 billion pounds Sterling through its wholly-owned and joint venture operations.

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