First F-35 Nears Completion At Lockheed Martin

With the installation of horizontal tails on the first F-35, the Lockheed MartinJoint Strike Fighter (JSF) team has completed assembly of the aircraft's major structural components. The next milestone in the aircraft's march to first flight is engine installation, planned for early 2006.

"The speed and precision of assembly on this airplane continues to impress even the most experienced aerospace veterans among us and far exceeds any program that has gone before it," said Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and F-35 JSF program general manager. "The ease with which this aircraft has come together, along with the quality of the fit and finish, is simply unprecedented in a first-off-the-line aircraft. It puts us down the path toward meeting our affordability goals."

The stealthy F-35 is a supersonic, multi-role, 5th generation fighter designed to replace aging AV-8B Harriers, A-10s, F-16s, F/A-18 Hornets and United Kingdom Harrier GR.7s and Sea Harriers. First flight is planned for fall 2006.

The horizontal tails installed on Dec. 8 and the vertical tails installed on Nov. 28 were designed and manufactured by BAE Systems in Samlesbury, England. Assemblers installed the aircraft's weapons-bay doors on Dec. 7. Final assembly began in May, when workers mated the Northrop Grumman-produced center fuselage to the Lockheed Martin-built wing at the F-35's final assembly operation in Fort Worth. The BAE Systems-produced aft fuselage and the Lockheed Martin forward fuselage were also joined to the overall aircraft assembly earlier in the year. Technicians switched on electrical power to the aircraft for the first time on Sept. 7.

Pratt & Whitney will deliver the aircraft's F135 engine before the end of December. The power plant, which produces 40,000 pounds of thrust, will make the F-35 the most powerful single-engine fighter ever to fly.

Lockheed Martin is developing the F-35 with its principal industrial partners, Northrop Grumman and BAE Systems. Two separate, interchangeable F-35 engines are under development: the Pratt & Whitney F135 turbofan and the F136 turbofan from the General Electric Rolls-Royce Fighter Engine Team.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 135,000 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.

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