First F-35 Exits Lockheed Martin Factory, Prepares For Testing

The Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter team has completed assembly of the first F-35 aircraft and moved it out of the factory in preparation for an intensive period of ground testing. First flight of the F-35, a conventional takeoff and landing version, remains on schedule for this fall.

The move on Feb. 19 capped a thorough design update from the Concept Development Phase of the program, and an innovative production process that yielded unprecedented levels of assembly accuracy, fit and finish.

"Our team's engineers, mechanics and assemblers deserve high praise for the precise way in which this airplane came together with very few issues," said Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and JSF program general manager. "The fact that this level of quality was achieved on our first aircraft, at the beginning of our learning curve, signals good things for the reliability and affordability of the thousands of F-35s that will follow."

Mechanics transferred the airplane to a nearby fueling facility where it will initially undergo a thorough fuel-system check-out. Structural coupling and ground-vibration testing will follow. Engine runs will begin in late spring and will lead into taxi tests in advance of first flight.

"I look at what this airplane is going to do, how it is going to change the nature of tactical warfare, and I am amazed," said Air Force Brig. Gen. C.R. Davis, deputy executive officer of the Joint Strike Fighter program. "This program is young, and plenty of hard work remains ahead, but the F-35's move to the flightline is a major milestone. It's a great day."

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.

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 GE Rolls-Royce Fighter Engine Team. Each power plant produces 40,000 pounds of thrust, making the F-35 the most powerful single- engine fighter ever to fly.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 135,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2005 sales of $37.2 billion.

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