F-35 Ground-Vibration Testing Finished Ahead Of Schedule; Initial Production Contract Awarded

PRNewswire-FirstCall
FORT WORTH, Texas

Ground-vibration testing for the first Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter finished early on April 30, continuing a string of testing milestones completed ahead of schedule.

"Completion of ground-vibration testing provides confidence in our structural design and critical technical data for our engineers," said Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and F-35 JSF program general manager. "The measured aircraft response closely matched our engineering predictions."

Bobby Williams, Lockheed Martin F-35 vice president for Air Vehicle Development, added, "Like the successful fueling and structural-coupling tests that preceded it, this test represents yet another important step toward first flight later this year." The vibration tests characterize the aircraft's responses to inputs to the wings, tails, rudders and flaps. The test data will be used to update analytical models developed during aircraft design, and again during flight testing.

The testing wrapped up one day after the U.S. Department of Defense announced it had issued a contract for procurement of raw materials and other items needed to start production of the first five operational F-35s. The contract authorizes $94 million for the purchase of those materials to ensure that the F-35 production schedule remains on track.

The F-35 is a 5th Generation, supersonic stealth fighter designed to replace a wide range of existing aircraft, including AV-8B Harriers, A-10s, F- 16s, F/A-18 Hornets and United Kingdom Harrier GR.7s and Sea Harriers. The F- 35 will be the most powerful single-engine fighter ever produced.

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 and the GE Rolls-Royce Fighter Engine Team F136.

The inaugural flight of the first F-35, a preproduction conventional takeoff and landing variant, is planned for this fall. Fifteen F-35s will undergo flight tests, seven will be used for static testing and another will validate the aircraft's radar signature.

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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