Lockheed Martin F-35 Completes First Ground Taxi Test

The F-35 Lightning II moved under its own power for the first time on Thursday afternoon, initiating the last series of tests before the fighter jet's first flight.

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20061208/DAF022)

After a series of systems checks at Lockheed Martinin Fort Worth, F-35 Chief Pilot Jon Beesley advanced the throttle and the F-35 moved out of its hangar to begin taxi tests. The jet then traveled at up to 30 knots (~ 35 m.p.h.) on the runway, testing systems such as brakes and nosewheel steering in advance of first flight. Medium-speed taxi tests of 65 knots (~ 75 m.p.h.) and 80 knots (~ 92 m.p.h.) are planned next, weather permitting. The first Lightning II is powered by the Pratt & Whitney F135 turbofan, the most powerful engine ever installed in a fighter aircraft.

The stealthy F-35 is a supersonic, multi-role, 5TH Generation 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.

Lockheed Martin is developing the F-35 Lightning II 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.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 140,000 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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