F-35 Lightning II Pushing Ahead On All Fronts

With 11 test aircraft on the assembly line, nine nations signed onto the program's production and sustainment phase, one aircraft deep into flight testing and another nearing completion, the F-35 Lightning II program is meeting its schedule and budget targets, and is on track to begin deliveries to the armed services in 2010.

"The Lightning II is a sophisticated machine and the program is extraordinarily complex, but the absolute commitment demonstrated by our international team is driving success after success, from the aircraft's first flight last December to the phenomenal accuracy and quality shown in the manufacturing process," said Tom Burbage, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and general manager of F-35 program integration. "We're proud that these and other remarkable achievements are the result of a global effort from our friends all over the world."

The first F-35, a conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) variant, has completed 19 test flights to date and has shown unusually high reliability for a first-article aircraft. The second F-35, a short takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) version, is on schedule for completion later this year and flight testing in 2008. Assembly quality of the first two aircraft already is surpassing that of fighters whose production processes are mature. Critical Design Review (CDR) for the carrier variant, designed for the catapult launches and arrested landings of a large aircraft carrier, is under way. CDRs for the CTOL and STOVL variants were completed successfully in 2006 and underscored the F-35's design maturity. Software development, historically a challenge on highly complex aircraft like the Lightning II, remains on track six years into the F-35's System Development and Demonstration phase.

In late 2006 and early 2007, all of the F-35 partner nations signed an agreement to extend their participation into the program's Production, Sustainment and Follow-On Development phase. Those countries are the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Canada, Australia, Denmark and Norway. Each country is involved in the design and production of the F-35.

Funding for the first two production-model Lightning IIs is approved, parts fabrication for these aircraft is under way and component assembly will begin later in 2007. The pair of F-35A aircraft are the first of 1,763 scheduled for delivery to the U.S. Air Force, beginning in 2010. The U.S. Marine Corps and Navy together are planning to operate 680 F-35Bs and F-35Cs, and the United Kingdom plans to place 138 F-35Bs into service with the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. The remaining F-35 participant countries plan to acquire from 600 to 700 aircraft, and further international sales are expected to create a demand for hundreds more Lightning IIs.

The F-35 is a supersonic, multi-role, 5th generation 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.

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 2006 sales of $39.6 billion.

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