VH-71 Presidential Helicopter Test Aircraft Completes Maiden Flight

The VH-71 helicopter made its maiden flight at AgustaWestland's facility in Yeovil, UK, on July 3, marking a significant milestone in the development of the United States' Presidential aircraft.

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The new "Marine One" will be the world's most technologically advanced helicopter that will safely and reliably transport the president and vice president of the United States, heads of state and other official parties both at home and abroad with mobile "Oval Office in the sky" capabilities. The designated Test Vehicle #2 (TV-2), built under contract to the U.S. Navy, was assembled and prepared at an AgustaWestland facility. It is the first test aircraft built specifically for the VH-71 Presidential Helicopters Program.

During the 40-minute flight, AgustaWestland Chief Test Pilot Don Maclaine and Senior Test Pilot Dick Trueman performed general aircraft handling checks, tested flight characteristics at varying speeds up to 135 knots, and evaluated the on-board avionics systems. Initial Operational Capability of the Presidential helicopter is scheduled for late 2009.

"Seeing our first VH-71 test vehicle flying is an important stepping stone and an exciting event for the entire program, the culmination of a tremendous amount of work by the Government and Industry team," said Doug Isleib, U.S. Navy program manager, Presidential Helicopters Program. "We all should be proud of this accomplishment as we look forward to the day when these helicopters are landing on the South Lawn of the White House."

"The success of the VH-71's first flight, less than 30 months from the contract's start, confirms the quality and dedication we have to designing, building and flying this state-of-the-art helicopter," said Steven C. Moss, president of AgustaWestland North America. "We are on track to fly three more test vehicles by early 2008 and this inaugural flight signifies a tremendous achievement and a step forward to delivering the Presidential aircraft on time."

"Today's first flight of TV-2 is a tremendous achievement," said Jeff Bantle, VH-71 vice president and general manager at Lockheed Martin Systems Integration in Owego, NY. "This marks the formal start of the VH-71 flight test program, and positions the team to deliver production aircraft capable of flying the President in October 2009."

Before TV-2 is delivered to the test facility in Patuxent River, MD this fall for structural testing, the aircraft will complete initial shake-down flying and embark on flight trials to test the integrated avionics systems and aircraft systems.

The VH-71 industry team will build a fleet of "Marine One" helicopters in two increments. Four test aircraft and five pilot production VH-71 aircraft comprising the Increment 1 phase are to be delivered through 2009. Increment 1 will answer the urgent need for an air system with enhanced performance. Increment 2 will see a significant increase in aircraft performance, and will feature technical enhancements designed to give command and control capability while in flight.

Aircraft final assembly will be by Bell Helicopter in Texas with missionization by Lockheed Martin Systems Integration in NY.

Lockheed Martin Systems Integration -- Owego is the prime contractor and systems integrator for the Navy's VH-71 Presidential Helicopter Replacement program with overall responsibility for the program and aircraft system. The VH-71 is based on AgustaWestland's successful EH101 multimission helicopter. Since 1997, over 130 EH101s have been delivered worldwide and are operated by the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, Italian Navy, Canadian forces, and the Governments of Denmark, Portugal and Japan. To date, the EH101 fleet has accumulated over 120,000 hours of worldwide operations in harsh operating environments including desert, maritime, arctic, and mountainous areas.

AgustaWestlandBell, the U.S. principal subcontractor to Lockheed Martin, has responsibility for the basic air vehicle design, production build, and basic air vehicle support functions, while General Electric is supplying the engines. More than 200 U.S. suppliers support the VH-71 program.

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.

AgustaWestland, a Finmeccanica company, is one of the largest helicopter companies in the world and is a technology leader in its market. The company has established product portfolio ranging from the innovative 2.8-ton light single engine AW119 Ke to the 16-ton three engine AW101 helicopter.

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