First Military Pilot Flies Lockheed Martin F-35

Lt. Col. James "Flipper" Kromberg of the U.S. Air Force became the first military service pilot to evaluate the F-35 Lightning II, taking the aircraft through a series of maneuvers Wednesday on its 26th flight.

Kromberg took off from Lockheed Martin'sFort Worth plant at 11:54 a.m. CST, flew the plane to 6,000 feet and checked handling qualities at 15-degrees angle of attack. He then climbed to 10,000 and 12,000 feet assessing the up-and-away flight-control response. Kromberg also tested the F-35's engine performance and formation-flying characteristics.

"The aircraft flew very well, exceeding my expectations," Kromberg said. "I was surprised by the amount of power on the takeoff roll. And the handling, particularly with the gear up, was phenomenal. The aircraft was very stable flying in formation with another airplane. It was really a joy to fly."

Kromberg, who is assigned to the 461st Flight Test Squadron as part of the development and execution of F-35 flight testing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., has logged more than 3,200 flight hours in aircraft that include the F-16, F-15, AV-8B and T-38. He becomes the third pilot to fly the Lightning II. Lockheed Martin pilots Jon Beesley and Jeff Knowles have flown all previous F-35 missions.

"With a planned acquisition of 1,763 F-35s, the U.S. Air Force is our biggest customer, and we've been eager to get their feedback about the aircraft's flight performance," said Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and F-35 program general manager. "This is the beginning of what will become a rigorous and extended series of in-flight evaluations by the Air Force, Marines, Navy and our international pilots."

Lockheed Martin test pilot Jeff Knowles flew the F-35's 27th flight later in the day Wednesday.

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 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 2007 sales of $41.9 billion.

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