Fourth F-35 Lightning II Rolls Out As Production Line Fills Up At Lockheed Martin

With one F-35 Lightning II aircraft in structural testing, two in flight test, six in final assembly and another 14 in various stages of production, Lockheed Martin added to the program's momentum on Saturday by finishing assembly of the fourth F-35 aircraft, a short takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) F-35B.

"The completion of our fourth F-35 -- and the growing line of aircraft now forming behind it -- shows an emerging rhythm in our production line," said Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and F-35 program general manager. "In just a few days we will have all three Lightning II variants in final assembly when we take delivery of the first F-35C carrier variant center fuselage. From the very first F-35, assembly quality has been unprecedented, and each successive aircraft is measurably better than the one that preceded it."

The new aircraft was moved immediately to the flight line, where it will undergo an extensive battery of ground tests before its first flight in early 2009. The first F-35B made its inaugural flight on June 11 and has completed nine missions. The first F-35A, a conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) variant, has flown 45 times.

The U.S. Marine Corps is expected to operate about 340 F-35Bs. The United Kingdom's Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, and the Italian Air Force and Navy also will operate the STOVL variant, which will be the world's first STOVL aircraft to combine stealth with supersonic speed.

The F-35 is a supersonic, multi-role, 5th generation stealth fighter. Three F-35 variants derived from a common design, developed together and using the same sustainment infrastructure worldwide, will replace at least 13 types of aircraft for 11 nations initially, making the Lightning II the most cost-effective fighter program in history.

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 is a global security company that 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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