Lockheed Martin F-35 Successfully Wraps Up Testing At Edwards AFB, Validates Readiness For Future Test Deployment

The first Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II fighter has finished all planned testing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., demonstrating that the aircraft, the support crews, and contractor and military service personnel are ready for the dramatically expanded flight testing on the program's horizon.

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20081023/LATH088)

"This initial round of testing at Edwards is just the beginning," said Doug Pearson, Lockheed Martin vice president of the F-35 Integrated Test Force. "The exceptional performance of the aircraft and those supporting it shows that the team is ready for the fast-paced flight test activities upcoming at Edwards and [Naval Air Station] Patuxent River, Md." By the end of 2009, all 19 F-35 test aircraft will be complete and flight test activities will intensify, leading to Initial Operational Test & Evaluation in the 2013-2014 time frame.

During the three-week deployment at Edwards, most of the F-35's activity centered on a set of crucial tests that validated the aircraft's ability to shut down and restart its engine in flight. During the tests -- conducted to ensure that the aircraft can regain power and be flown safely in the event of an unanticipated engine flameout -- the Pratt & Whitney F135 turbofan repeatedly restarted on command.

"Our goal was to collect in-flight data during 12 specific test cases over Edwards, and we did exactly that," Pearson said. "The initial data review and pilot-reported results are very favorable and meet or exceed our expectations."

With all Edwards testing successfully completed, F-35 Test Pilot Jeff Knowles will fly the aircraft back to Lockheed Martin's Fort Worth, Texas, plant this week. "In addition to confirming that the engine spools up and restarts very quickly after being shut off in flight, we found that the airplane itself showed high reliability and was always ready for its next mission," Knowles said. "That kind of performance in an early development plane bodes well for the aircraft we deliver to the fleet."

The deployment began on Oct. 1 when Knowles flew the Lightning II nonstop from Fort Worth to Edwards, landing "code one," or without any aircraft discrepancies.

"Our modeling and simulation indicated a robust propulsion system design. With the completion of testing at Edwards I am even more confident we have an excellent design that demonstrates appropriate performance and margin to accommodate unplanned conditions if encountered," Pearson said, adding that support from the U.S. Air Force and the F-35 logistics team were outstanding and "enabled us to meet every scheduled event."

The F-35 involved in the testing is a conventional takeoff and landing variant that has completed 63 flights.

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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