Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II Flies Supersonic

Achieves Another Significant Milestone

The Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter flew supersonic for the first time yesterday, achieving another milestone. The aircraft accelerated to Mach 1.05, or about 680 miles per hour.

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20081114/LAF048)

The test validated the F-35 Lightning II's capability to operate beyond the speed of sound and was accomplished with a full internal load of inert or "dummy" weapons on the one-hour flight.

"The F-35 transitioned from subsonic to supersonic just as our engineers and our computer modeling had predicted," said Jon Beesley, Lockheed Martin's chief F-35 test pilot. "I continue to be impressed with the aircraft's power and strong acceleration, and I'm pleased that its precise handling qualities are retained in supersonic flight, even with a payload of 5,400 pounds (2,450 kilograms) in the weapons bays."

Beesley said it was also a significant achievement for a test aircraft to fly supersonic for the first time with the weight of a full internal load of weapons. The milestone was achieved on the 69th flight of F-35 aircraft AA-1. Beesley climbed to 30,000 feet (9,144 meters) and accelerated to Mach 1.05, or about 680 miles per hour, over a rural area in north Texas. The F-35 accomplished four transitions through the sound barrier, spending a total of eight minutes in supersonic flight. The flight was preceded by a high-subsonic mission earlier in the day. Future testing will gradually expand the flight envelope out to the aircraft's top speed of Mach 1.6, which the F-35 is designed to achieve with a full internal load of weapons.

F-35 AA-1, a conventional takeoff and landing variant (CTOL), and F-35 BF-1, a short takeoff/vertical landing variant (STOVL), together have combined for 83 test 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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