Second Lockheed Martin F-35B STOVL Fighter Achieves Successful First Flight

Lockheed Martin's second short takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) F-35B Lightning II accomplished its first flight on Wednesday, Feb. 25. The aircraft, known as BF-2, joins a conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) F-35A and another STOVL F-35B that already have logged a combined total of 84 flights.

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20090225/DA75644)

During its flight on Wednesday, BF-2 went through a series of maneuvers to assess its subsystems and basic handling qualities, and to check on-board instrumentation. Subsequent missions will take the aircraft higher and faster, in a structured series of flights. All F-35 test aircraft to date have been powered by the Pratt & Whitney F135 turbofan, the most powerful engine ever to fly in a jet fighter.

"The F-35 program is now entering a period of greatly accelerated flight testing, as aircraft are delivered to the flight line at an ever-increasing rate," said Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and F-35 program general manager. "Each aircraft that rolls off the assembly line fulfills a unique verification objective and moves us closer to our customers' initial operational capability dates."

BF-2 is on schedule to deploy to Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Md., later this year. It will remain in Fort Worth for the next several months to conduct a series of ground-test events, instrumentation calibrations, powered hover-pit testing (simulating flight) and airworthiness flights, including STOVL-mode operation. Initial flights will be in conventional mode.

BF-2 is essentially identical to the first STOVL jet, BF-1. The major difference lies with the instrumentation - the two aircraft have different roles during flight testing. BF-2 will conduct flutter envelope expansion, air-refueling testing, high angle-of-attack testing, performance and propulsion testing, weapons testing and radar-signature testing. BF-1 will concentrate on initial STOVL flight operations such as short takeoffs, hovers and vertical landings, and will conduct ship-suitability and gun-integration testing. BF-1's first vertical landing is planned for the middle of 2009.

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.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin is a global security company that employs about 146,000 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 2008 sales of $42.7 billion.

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