

Lockheed Martin Flies Optimized Conventional F-35

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Lockheed Martin's first optimized conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) F-35 Lightning II fighter made its inaugural flight on Saturday, Nov. 14, the fourth F-35 to begin flight operations.

(Photo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20091116/DA11648>)

Piloted by Lockheed Martin test pilot David "Doc" Nelson, the F-35A, called AF-1, left Lockheed Martin's Fort Worth plant and flew to 20,000 feet and Mach 0.6. Nelson raised and lowered the landing gear, performed 360-degree rolls and lifted the nose to 20 degrees angle of attack during an 89-minute flight. AF-1 was built on the same production line as the 31 Low Rate Initial Production aircraft now in assembly. The aircraft incorporates many evolutionary improvements and updates derived from the test program of AA-1, the first F-35. AF-1 joins two F-35B short takeoff/vertical landing variants currently in flight test.

"The initial flight of the first optimized CTOL aircraft represents a significant achievement for the program and sets the stage for what's promising to be a successful flight test program," said Maj. Gen. C.D. Moore, deputy program executive officer for the Joint Strike Fighter Program Office. "We are excited to see AF-1 taking flight, as it portends a bright CTOL future for the USAF and the partner nations. The hard work on the production line and the flight line has paid off, and the workers deserve a hearty congratulations."

Doug Pearson, Lockheed Martin vice president for F-35 test and verification, said, "AF-1 is one of the most important aircraft in our test fleet because knowledge gained from its use expanding the flight envelope will benefit the other two variants, and every F-35 ever built. AF-1 is also the first F-35 to roll off our moving assembly line, having achieved the maximum production speed of 50 inches per hour during a trial high-speed assembly sequence. The moving assembly line, designed to improve production quality and speed, is the first ever for a modern fighter."

The F-35 Lightning II is a 5th generation fighter, combining advanced stealth with fighter speed and agility, fully-fused sensor information, network-enabled operations, and lower operational and support costs. 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 2008 sales of \$42.7 billion.

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