

# Skunk Works® Advances Sensor-Powered AI Fighter Intercept

*Partnership with U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School expands autonomy into live mission system flight tests on the X-62 VISTA.*

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif., Aug. 4, 2026 [/PRNewswire/](#) -- In a landmark step toward the future of airborne autonomy, Lockheed Martin Skunk Works® (NYSE: LMT), the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School (TPS) and industry partners demonstrated sensor-driven autonomy on a fighter aircraft. An artificial intelligence (AI) agent used targeting information from an operational sensor to execute successful air intercepts against a live target. Across eight flights, **the X-62 Variable In-flight Simulation Test Aircraft (VISTA) executed 27 AI-controlled intercepts.**

## THE OBJECTIVE

Demonstrate that the X-62 and its integrated autonomy architecture can successfully use real sensor data to inform AI behavior, validating the full test cycle from development and simulation through training and flight execution.

## THE SUCCESS AND WHY IT MATTERS

- **Closed-loop AI combat test:** X-62 equipped with the Lockheed Martin Legion Pod® tracks a live T-38 jet and feeds secure data to an AI agent that **autonomously pilots the fighter into a tactical intercept position.**
- **Real-world sensor data:** Moves AI testing from simulated target data to real-time, on-board sensor streams, **mirroring the data environment pilots will face** in future high-stakes engagements.
- **Accelerated autonomy:** Skunk Works' "Supermassive" AI agent generation capability dramatically improves speed and agility. Full integration and ground test of the agents with the X-62 occurred in **just three months.**
- **Strategic partnership:** Connects the cutting-edge of the U.S. Air Force test community with industry expertise, **expanding the TPS's AI and autonomy test portfolio** to include mission-critical onboard systems.
- **Enhanced pilot survivability:** By delegating complex tasks to AI, pilots gain bandwidth to focus on tactical information that increases their effectiveness and survivability.

## EXPERT PERSPECTIVES

"Our ongoing partnership with TPS is driving important progress with this latest flight test series demonstrating that our AI can effectively and reliably close the sensor-to-action loop aboard an operational combat aircraft," said Ron Fehlen, vice president and general manager, Lockheed Martin Skunk Works®. "Our autonomous agents consumed classified infrared search and track feeds and executed combat-critical maneuvers in real time. This achievement marks a decisive advance toward delivering AI-augmented air dominance for the United States."

"Our ability to provide reliable sensor data is critical, but the real advantage comes when that data can connect seamlessly with AI to take action," said Stacy Kubicek, vice president and general manager, Lockheed Martin Sensors and Global Sustainment. "This project demonstrates how sensing and autonomous AI can come together as a force multiplier to make faster, more informed action in complex environments."

## FUTURE OUTLOOK AND NEXT STEPS

Skunk Works has been a key partner and integrator on X-62 for decades, providing open software and hardware architectures that enable pathfinding flight tests. Leveraging the proven framework from this experiment, the X-62's Mission Systems Upgrade will enable the aircraft to demonstrate seamless integration of combat systems, sensors and airborne AI agents within a next-generation mesh network.

The path forward is exciting as this team aggressively executes technology roadmaps, in close coordination and

partnership with operators, to guarantee American leadership in AI and autonomy. Skunk Works engineers are the best in the world, and their work to transform the future of air combat is ensuring air dominance now and for the years to come.

Learn more about recent X-62 flight test activity [here](#).

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