Super Hornet Tackles Barricade Testing Head on

Propelled by a special jet "car," an unmanned F/A-18E streaked down a track at speeds comparable to those of an aircraft landing on an aircraft carrier. Instead of using a tailhook to catch an arresting cable, this Super Hornet was stopped safely by a nylon barricade.

This was the first of six tests planned to demonstrate the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet's compatibility with the emergency barricades currently used on aircraft carriers. The barricade is made of nylon straps that envelope the aircraft to stop its forward motion. In emergency situations, a barricade is stretched across the carrier deck to stop the aircraft and to ensure the safety of the pilot and the carrier crew.

The barricade test was conducted recently at Naval Air Station Lakehurst, N.J., using a jet car -- a rail-guided push car powered by four J-57 jet engines -- to propel the F/A-18E down a mile-and-one-half long track into the barricade. The jet car can develop 42,000 pounds of thrust and attain speeds of up to 250 knots.

The test F/A-18E accelerated to 110.8 knots over a 6,000-foot run, engaged the barricade and came to rest approximately 200 yards later -- exactly as planned. The test vehicle was configured with wing tip missile launchers.

A total of six barricade engagement tests are scheduled at two-week intervals at varying speeds and weapons loads configurations. Speeds will range from 110 to 145 knots. The next test configuration will include all wing pylons installed and one AGM-88 High Speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM) on the midboard left-hand pylon.

Upon completion of barricade engagement testing in November, the test vehicle will be returned to St. Louis for refurbishment in preparation for live-fire testing at China Lake, Calif., next year.

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