

First Production V-22 Osprey Fuselage Spliced

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The three major fuselage sections of the first production V-22 Osprey were joined today at the Boeing facility in suburban Philadelphia. The V-22 tiltrotor is being developed by the team of Bell Helicopter Textron in Fort Worth, Texas, and Boeing in Philadelphia.

The aircraft, Osprey No. 11, is the first of five aircraft in low rate initial production (LRIP) Lot I. Following operational testing by a joint service test team, it will go into the U.S. Marine Corp's tiltrotor training squadron (VMMT-204) at Marine Corps Air Station New River in Jacksonville, N.C.

John Buyers, Bell Boeing program director, said, "The completion of this aircraft's basic airframe is a milestone in the program's transition from development into production." According to Buyers, "This fuselage incorporates the lessons we learned in the Osprey's full scale development and engineering and manufacturing development phases as well as some pioneering advances in manufacturing technology. As a result, it was accomplished on schedule and on cost."

Buyers added, "The use of manufacturing automation, integrated product teams and our advanced technology assembly system have produced a high-quality, high-precision product. We have a robust, repeatable process that yields excellent fit and finish and greatly reduces manufacturing and assembly errors."

An example of the efficiency of the Osprey's manufacturing process: The splicing took place with no out-of-sequence work, and the fuselage was assembled to a tolerance of .01 inches (equivalent to the thickness of a matchbook cover).

The fuselage was first built in three major pieces: the forward section, including the cockpit and avionics/electronics racks; the center section, consisting of the main cabin, landing gear and wing attachment points; and the aft fuselage, which holds the rear ramp and empennage (or tail) attachment points. Many systems were installed in these sections prior to their joining, although the final installation of wiring and hydraulic lines will be accomplished after splicing is completed.

The completed fuselage will be shipped to Bell Helicopter in August for the wing-to-fuselage mate. First flight of Osprey No. 11 will occur in early 1999 in Fort Worth. Delivery is scheduled for later in 1999. U.S. Navy approval of LRIP Lot II and advanced procurement for LRIP Lot III is expected this spring.

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