

T-38 Talon with Boeing Avionics Upgrade Makes First Flight

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A T-38C Talon jet trainer, with its new Boeing digital cockpit upgrade, made its first flight from Williams Gateway Airport here July 8. The aircraft, tail number 64-197, lifted off runway 30L at 4:10 p.m. for its one hour, 10 minute flight.

This T-38 is one of two in an engineering and manufacturing development phase of the U.S. Air Force T-38 Avionics Upgrade Program. Through that program, the Aerospace Support business unit of Boeing and its major avionics integration subcontractor, Israel Aircraft Industries Lahav Division, are installing a comprehensive avionics package to provide a reliable, cost-effective training environment similar to current and future generation fighter/bombers.

The Avionics Upgrade Program is part of the Air Force Pacer Classic initiative that will extend the life of the advanced supersonic trainers until the year 2040. The T-38A first flew in 1959. There currently are more than 500 Talons in service with the Air Force.

During the flight, flown by Boeing test pilot Ed Wilson in the front cockpit and Air Force test pilot Capt. John Deems in the rear cockpit, the aircraft conducted functional test flight procedures in visual flight rules conditions. These included "first-order" avionics checks; negative G and inverted maneuvers; landing gear extension and retraction; stalls; engine shut down and relighting; and an instrument landing system approach.

The flight today over central Arizona came one month ahead of the program's initial schedule.

Col. Dave Abati, T-38 System Program Director for the Air Force, said that the first flight "marks the beginning of a new era for Air Force advanced student pilot and fundamental fighter training. Also, it demonstrates how Air Force and contractor personnel teamed together can achieve successful results through consistent, effective communication and dedication to program objectives."

This T-38 will depart Williams Gateway later this month for Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., for the remainder of its flight-test program.

Under the T-38 Avionics Upgrade Program, Boeing is upgrading the aircraft with a large-field-of-view head-up display in the front cockpit; multi-functional displays, electronic engine displays and up-front control panels in both cockpits; an integrated global positioning system/inertial navigation system; and a traffic collision avoidance system. In addition, Boeing is responsible for delivering ground-based Operational Flight Trainers and Unit Training Devices, as well as logistics support of the aircraft's avionics and trainers.

The Avionics Upgrade Program will improve the avionics reliability of the T-38 by a factor of seven and reduce support costs significantly. The program also will allow the trainers to meet new national airspace requirements.

Modification of the aircraft is being performed at the Boeing facility at Williams Gateway Airport.

The first production aircraft, which will receive the designation "T-38C" and a new gray paint scheme, will be delivered in January 2000.

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