First Production V-22 Shipped to Bell for Wing Mate

The first production V-22 Osprey fuselage was shipped today from The Boeing Company in suburban Philadelphia. It departed on an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III cargo plane from Philadelphia to the Bell Helicopter Textron V-22 assembly facility in Arlington, Texas, where final assembly will start with the wing-to-fuselage mate.

This aircraft, Osprey No. 11, is the first of five production aircraft in Low Rate Initial Production Lot I. Following operational testing by a joint service test team, it will go into the first U.S. Marine Corps tiltrotor training squadron, VMMT 204, at Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C.

The V-22 is being developed by the team of Bell Helicopter Textron and The Boeing Company, long known for producing the venerable tandem rotor helicopters, the CH-46 Sea Knight and CH-47 Chinook.

"The completion of this aircraft fuselage signals that the V-22 production phase is under way while validating the Osprey's design and manufacturing concepts and tooling," said Chuck Vehlow, vice president and general manager. "This fuselage incorporates the lessons we learned in the Osprey's full scale development and engineering and manufacturing development (EMD) phases which reflect significant advances in manufacturing."

The extensive use of automation, Integrated Product Teams and the Boeing Advanced Technology Assembly system have produced a high-quality, high-precision product that shows outstanding first-time fit and finish to extremely close tolerances, according to Vehlow.

An example of the precision fit of the Osprey's parts is the final alignment of the fuselage sections. V-22 engineers have determined the sections fit together to a tolerance of .01-inch, or the thickness equivalent of a matchbook cover.

The fuselage was first assembled 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.

Rollout of Osprey No. 11 is scheduled at Bell in early 1999 with delivery to the U.S. Navy at the Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, Md., in May 1999. Four EMD Ospreys, Nos. 7, 8, 9 and 10, are in flight test there now.

EMD Ospreys have completed developmental envelope expansion testing achieving such milestones as a 3.9 G load factor at 260 knots, 60,500 pounds maximum takeoff gross weight, 25,000 feet in altitude, a maximum speed of 342 knots, night flights using night vision goggles and external loads of 10,000 pounds at 230 knots. V-22s have also participated in extensive ground-based and shipboard tests. Aircraft 9 and 10 began operational testing this month, which continues through October. Pilots with the Bell Boeing test team, along with the multi-service operational test team have flown more than 670 hours on the EMD aircraft. V-22s have flown more than 1,850 hours since first flight in March 1989. Sea trials are expected to begin in February 1999, followed by operational evaluation that begins in September 1999 and completes in May 2000.

The Bell Boeing Tiltrotor Team, comprised of Bell Helicopter Textron in Fort Worth, Texas, and The Boeing Company in Philadelphia, developed the V-22 tiltrotor for the U.S. Marine Corps, Navy and Special Operations Forces. Bell Helicopter Textron, Inc., is a wholly owned subsidiary of Textron, Inc. of Providence, R. I.

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