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The nation's newest strike fighter, the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, has moved from the Boeing production line up into the sky.

The first production Super Hornet, F/A-18E6, successfully completed its first flight Nov. 6, from Lambert International Airport in St. Louis. The single-seat Super Hornet took off at 11:56 a.m., with Boeing test pilot Dave Desmond at the controls. The flight lasted 1.3 hours.

"E6 performed flawlessly," Desmond said. "I encountered no problems during the flight, which is exactly what I'd expect from a Super Hornet."

E6 is one of the first lot of 12 low-rate initial production Super Hornets to enter production at Boeing and Northrop Grumman facilities. Delivery of the first production model Super Hornet is scheduled for January 1999.

Assembly is scheduled to begin on the second lot of 20 low-rate initial production Super Hornets at Boeing facilities in December. The aircraft were funded in the fiscal year 1998 defense budget.

The three-year Super Hornet flight-test program is now more than 96 percent complete. As of Oct. 31, the seven flight-test aircraft have completed 2,461 flights and flown more than 3,703 hours. In addition, flutter flight testing was completed Oct. 23 - one month ahead of schedule.

The Super Hornet is built by an industry team led by Boeing. Boeing builds the forward fuselage and wings, and conducts final assembly. Northrop Grumman Corp. is the principal airframe subcontractor, supplying the center and aft fuselage. General Electric Co. produces the engines, and Raytheon Co. provides the radar.

NOTE TO EDITORS

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Satellite coordinates for a feed of the first flight are C-BAND Galaxy 6 Transponder 7, KU-BAND Telstar 5 Transponder 25 from 9:30 to 9:45 a.m. CST. The trouble number is (314) 421-2833.

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