Boeing Super Hornet Completes First Night Carrier Operations

A highlight of the recently completed F/A-18E/F Super Hornet sea trials was the first night carrier launch and recovery of a Super Hornet on March 8.

Although night landings on an aircraft carrier are more difficult and typically more stressful than daytime recoveries, flight test pilot Lt. Cdr. Lance Floyd and weapon system officer Lt. Alan Armstrong reported that F/A-18F1 handled as promised with no surprises. According to Armstrong, "You're always a little apprehensive flying at night, but it was great."

Floyd explained that these operations are serious developmental work. "We are out trying to find the edges of the flight envelope," he said.

In addition to night operations, the Super Hornets were put through a series of rigorous carrier suitability tests that pushed the aircraft to limits far beyond those expected during normal operations, according to Capt. Robert Wirt, Navy flight test director. Other tests conducted include asymmetric weapons carriage, stores separation, single-engine landings, crosswind takeoffs and landings, and automatic carrier landing system approaches.

Sea trials are the final development test for the Super Hornet before the aircraft is turned over to the U.S. Navy for Operational Evaluation (OPEVAL). The Super Hornet is scheduled to enter OPEVAL with Navy test squadron VX-9 at Naval Air Station China Lake, Calif., in May. OPEVAL will consist of more than 800 flights in a six-month period.

The aircraft will be tested in all mission areas, in various climates and at sea aboard an aircraft carrier.

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