Boeing Beats Schedule Again; Delivers X-32B Forebody Early

Repeating its exceptional performance on the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) X-32A forward fuselage, Boeing has completed the forebody of its X-32B concept demonstrator aircraft significantly ahead of schedule, under cost and under weight.

The new forebody -- produced in St. Louis -- was delivered today to the company's X-vehicle assembly facility in Palmdale, Calif., in time for an early start of final assembly, which is the joining of the major fuselage sections, along with the wing and tail section. In March, Boeing delivered the X-32A forebody under the same conditions.

"Our use of the most lean design and manufacturing processes and tools available today has really paid off," said Frank Statkus, Boeing vice president and JSF program manager. "Our concept demonstrators are snapping together in the assembly process faster and better than anyone thought possible. It's a real tribute to our team and its commitment to making the Boeing JSF the best value for the customer."

The forebodies of the X-32A and B were designed, developed and produced by a Boeing Phantom Works team in St. Louis for the two concept demonstration aircraft being developed by Boeing for the JSF competition. The X-32A will demonstrate carrier suitability flying qualities and conventional takeoff and landing capabilities; the X-32B, short takeoff/vertical landing, hover and transition capabilities.

"By building on our experience from the X-32A forebody -- which we completed in half the traditional amount of time and delivered two weeks early -- we improved our performance on the X-32B forebody by completing it six weeks early," said Jerry Ennis, vice president of Advanced Manufacturing and Prototyping for the Boeing Phantom Works.

"This performance clearly demonstrates that Boeing has made significant breakthroughs in the way future aircraft will be designed, developed and manufactured for much greater affordability as well as for improved performance," Ennis added.

JSF is being developed as a next-generation strike fighter aircraft for use by the U.S. Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and the U.K. Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. The primary focus of the program is on affordability -- demonstrating ways to dramatically reduce the cost of aircraft development, production and ownership.

Among the lean design and manufacturing technologies Boeing is using to dramatically cut cycle times and cost are advanced 3-D modeling and simulation, automated fiber placement, high speed milling machines and simple, low-cost holding fixtures for assembly.

"The use of these advanced design tools and low-cost manufacturing and assembly techniques is helping Boeing cut design cycle times and costs up to 40 percent and production cycle time up to 30 percent," Statkus said. "As a result, we're making great progress on the other major sections of the X-32B and on final assembly of the X-32A."

The X-32B forebody is scheduled to be mated with the center and aft fuselage sections this week.

Boeing expects to complete its two JSF concept demonstration aircraft on schedule and on cost. The JSF program is scheduled to select a competition winner in 2001.

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