Boeing Completes Wing Mate of Second X-32 Demonstrator

Yesterday Boeing mechanics attached the single-piece wing for the X-32B to its fuselage, completing a major step in the final assembly of the second Boeing Joint Strike Fighter concept demonstrator aircraft. Overall, assembly of the wing for the X-32B took one-third less time than its predecessor, the X-32A.

"The speed and simplicity of this second wing mate demonstrate the value of high commonality among the three service variants of the JSF," said Frank Statkus, Boeing vice president and JSF general manager. Boeing is designing highly common variants of the operational JSF for the U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. The U.K. Royal Air Force and Royal Navy plan to use the Marine Corps variant.

"This is another step that showcases the lean concepts and management approach that we'll carry forward into the next phase of the program," Statkus said.

The company is building two X-32 aircraft that will meet the JSF program's three concept-demonstration objectives: 1) demonstrate commonality across the variants, including design/build processes; 2) demonstrate the Boeing direct-lift propulsion concept for short takeoff/vertical landing hover and transition to flight; and 3) demonstrate low-speed aircraft carrier-approach flying qualities.

"We are using the same assembly process and tools to build on our experience and make the process less expensive as we go along." said John Priday, X-32 factory manager.

Three-dimensional solid modeling and assembly simulation, laser-guided part positioning and minimal tooling are some of the advanced approaches Boeing has used. Thanks to these and other "lean" concepts, overall X-32 fabrication and assembly costs remain 30 to 40 percent below projections that were already low compared to previous aircraft development programs. Also, thanks largely to digital design processes, no unplanned shimming has been required in the assembly of either concept demonstrator.

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