Boeing JSF Concept Demonstrator Completes First Flight

The Boeing Joint Strike Fighter X-32A concept demonstrator today successfully recorded a major milestone when the airplane made its initial flight, flying from Palmdale and landing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

The first flight marks the X-32A's entry into a five-month flight-test program at Edwards with approximately 50 test flights totaling about 100 hours to validate the JSF's flying qualities and performance for conventional and aircraft carrier operations.

"Today, our Boeing JSF team continued its remarkable progress toward building a strike aircraft for our customers that will affordably meet their requirements on day one and for decades to come," said Boeing Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Phil Condit.

During the flight, Boeing JSF Chief Test Pilot Fred Knox put the X-32A through some initial airworthiness tests, including flying qualities and sub-systems checkout.

"The airplane is a pleasure to fly," Knox said. "It is already showing the precise handling qualities we expected based on the simulator work."

The X-32A and X-32B carry "X" designations rather than the more familiar "Y" because they are concept demonstrators, not prototypes. As such, they will not compete in a "fly-off" competition to determine who is selected to proceed to the next phase of the program.

Instead, the U.S. Department of Defense requires that the JSF X aircraft successfully demonstrate three objectives: commonality and modularity among JSF variants; low-speed carrier approach flying and handling qualities; and short takeoff, transition, hover and vertical landing.

Frank Stakus, Boeing vice president and JSF general manager, said the successful first flight is a testimony to the outstanding efforts of the Boeing JSF One Team.

"Throughout this program we have consistently proven what we can do rather than just talking about what we will do," Statkus said. "Today's flight is further evidence the Boeing JSF One Team delivers performance as promised."

The Boeing JSF One Team is a multinational effort that includes leading aerospace and technology companies from the United States, United Kingdom, Denmark and The Netherlands, as well as representatives from the U.S. government's JSF program office.

Statkus said both X-32 concept demonstrators will validate simulations and predictive tools that will give Boeing total confidence in the flight-performance characteristics of its design for the operational JSF.

"Our team used the same advanced tools and processes to design, build and test the X-32 concept demonstrators that it will use in the next phase of the program," Statkus said. "By using these tools and processes now, we generate verifiable cost data that gives our affordability projections a very high confidence factor."

The X-32A is one of two concept demonstrators Boeing is building to demonstrate the design concepts used for the operational JSF. It will demonstrate conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) for the U.S. Air Force and carrier approach flying qualities for the U.S. Navy. The X-32B, which is expected to fly in the first quarter of 2001, will demonstrate short takeoff and vertical landing (STOVL) requirements for the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.K. Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. Boeing recently installed the propulsion system in the X-32B aircraft at the Palmdale test site.

Boeing is the world leader in design, production and support of CTOL and STOVL strike fighters, as well as in large scale "system of systems" integration and lean, efficient design and manufacturing for military and commercial programs.

Boeing is competing to build the JSF under a four-year U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps concept demonstration contract, while also defining the design for the operational JSF. A competition winner is scheduled to be selected in 2001.

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