Boeing JSF X-32A Begins Simulated Carrier Landing Tests

The Boeing Joint Strike Fighter X-32A concept demonstrator aircraft today successfully began field carrier landing practice (FCLP) tests to demonstrate flying and handling qualities during low-speed aircraft carrier approach.

U.S. Navy Cmdr. Phillip "Rowdy" Yates, the U.S. government's lead test pilot for the Boeing JSF program, and Boeing lead test pilot Fred Knox are demonstrating simulated carrier landings using a Fresnel lens on the ground to provide pilot cues during their approaches to a simulated carrier deck outlined on a runway at Edwards Air Force Base.

"The X-32A demonstrated excellent low-speed flying qualities in the carrier mode configuration," Yates said. "Flight path control was precise all the way to touch down - this aircraft continues to fly as simulations predicted it would."

Including today's 30-minute flight, Boeing now has completed 18 flights and 24 percent of the program's overall flight-test objectives, as well as 54 percent of its carrier variant (CV) approach objectives.

"These successful CV tests are significant because the data we're gathering clearly demonstrates we are meeting our customers' objectives early in the flight-test program," said Katy Fleming, Boeing JSF system test director. "This is another important step toward ensuring we're compatible with U.S. Navy requirements, which is one of the concept development phase (CDP) core objectives."

Also significant is the fact that Boeing is demonstrating commonality - a CDP objective - with one aircraft. The X-32A is demonstrating both the CV and conventional landing and takeoff handling qualities without any modifications or changes to the aircraft.

The commonality/modularity requirement was also amply demonstrated in 1999 when the X-32A and the second Boeing demonstrator aircraft, the X-32B were assembled with the same tooling and with a high percentage of common parts.

The X-32B will demonstrate short takeoff and vertical landing capabilities for the U.S. Marine Corps, U.K. Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. In late September, Boeing completed the first engine runs on the X-32B aircraft at its Palmdale, Calif., test site.

During flight test the two JSF demonstrator aircraft must successfully demonstrate three objectives originally outlined at the beginning of the CDP phase in 1996:

commonality and modularity among JSF variants;

low-speed carrier approach flying and handling qualities;

short takeoff, transition, hover and vertical landing.

Boeing X-32 flight test is another key piece of the company's aggressive risk-reduction program, following closely on the heels of its groundbreaking avionics flying lab and full-mission simulation demonstrations and full-scale signature and supportability pole model testing.

The Boeing-led One Team 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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