Bell Boeing Chief Osprey Test Pilot Receives Recognition for Efforts

Tom Macdonald, the Bell Boeing V-22 Integrated Test Team's chief test pilot, was recently awarded the National Defense Industrial Association's (NDIA) Contractor Tester of the Year Award at the organization's annual conference in Sparks, Nev. NDIA presents this award annually to the outstanding defense civilian, outstanding military and outstanding supporting contractor for each of the military services and OSD.

"I'm honored to be singled out by NDIA," Macdonald said, "but this really is recognition of the efforts of the entire V-22 team."

Macdonald, who has accumulated nearly 700 hours of flight time in the V-22, was the first test pilot in history to fully define a high rate of descent -- low airspeed envelope for a helicopter-like aircraft. In order to accurately define the Osprey's operating envelope, he repeatedly flew the aircraft to test points that were at once close to load limits, flapping limits, and the aerodynamic departure boundary. As Macdonald hit these test points, he discovered the V-22's prop/rotor gave off few physical cues as the aircraft approached the departure boundary, or "Vortex Ring State". Macdonald flew the Osprey into departures and verified the proposed recovery technique. This skilled flying, along with his recommendations for the type and placement of a pilot high rate of descent warning system, will ensure the Osprey is safe and operational for fleet pilots in the future.

"Tom's leadership, piloting skills, and timely judgment carried this testing phase to a successful conclusion," said Michael Tkach, V-22 program director. "Tom and the V-22 team did all this under the scrutiny of the Department of Defense, with the fate of the V-22 program in the balance."

In 2003, Macdonald received the Society of Experimental Test Pilots' prestigious Iven C. Kincheloe Award for his efforts.

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