

Boeing X-45A Begins Testing New Software Build

The Boeing [NYSE: BA] X-45A unmanned aircraft completed two critical flights last week at NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center, Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

The Boeing Joint Unmanned Combat Air Systems (J-UCAS) X-45A technology demonstrator took to the air on Mar. 11 and 14. These were the first tests of the final build of the Block 2 software, flying to the aircraft's maximum demonstration envelope of 0.75M and 35,000 ft; it also opened and closed the weapons bay, clearing the vehicle to conduct the rest of the Block 2 flights. The information gathered from the flights allow the team to proceed with the upcoming inert weapons drop from the X-45 weapons bay and multiple vehicle coordinated flights. The flight also included transmitting a (stored) synthetic aperture radar (SAR) image to the ground operator, demonstrating the capability to do so within the operational timeline and bandwidth constraints.

"These flights went extremely well," said Darryl Davis, J-UCAS X-45 program manager, for Boeing. "Not only did we gather critical data enabling future milestones, the aircraft demonstrated its ability to interoperate with manned aircraft. During the test, a T-38 pilot declared an in-flight emergency when our aircraft was on final approach with the gear down. Our team successfully sent the X-45 around the pattern allowing the other aircraft to land uneventfully."

The J-UCAS X-45 program is a DARPA/U.S. Air Force/U.S. Navy/Boeing effort to demonstrate the technical feasibility, military utility and operational value of an unmanned air combat system for both the Air Force and the Navy.

The two X-45A technology demonstrators are currently verifying the core functionality of the software necessary for these and related missions. The first flight for the X-45C will be in mid 2006.

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