Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey Resumes Air-to-Air Refueling Tests

The V-22 Integrated Test Team resumed air-to-air refueling flights recently for the first time since the program's return to flight in May of 2002.

Over the course of two one-hour flights in Osprey No. 22, U.S. Marine Corps test pilot Lt. Col. Kevin Gross, USMC, and Boeing [NYSE:BA] test pilot Steve Grohsmeyer, each connected with the refueling aircraft five times near Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River.

The primary purpose of the flights was to re-establish Gross and Grohsmeyer's day aerial refueling qualifications. No fuel was transferred.

"Air-to-air refueling is an easy task in the V-22," Lt. Col. Gross said after the flights. "The aircraft demonstrates positive and predictable characteristics in all axes but especially in the thrust axis where the pilot's ability to control closure rates is important." Gross said this particular refueling exercise was performed at airspeeds around 200 knots and an altitude of 10,000 feet.

Eventually the integrated test team will have six pilots qualified for day and night tanking, and for refueling while wearing night vision goggles -- all part of the developmental test plan.

Although Osprey No. 22 is currently outfitted with an eleven-foot fixed refueling probe, the qualification flights were the initial step toward testing a new retractable refueling probe. The retractable probe will be installed on Osprey No. 21, which is currently being modified at Pax River. The developmental testing of the retractable probe will begin early next month and should last about three weeks.

The retractable probe is just over nine feet long when extended but is flush with the nose when stowed -- a necessary feature for shipboard operations. The V-22's air-to-air refueling capability is the cornerstone of the ability to self-deploy and provides a significant increase in operational range over the legacy systems it will replace.

Air-to-air refueling developmental testing is just one area where the integrated test team is supporting VMX-22, the Osprey Test and Evaluation Squadron based at Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., as they prepare for operational evaluation next year. Once developmental testing is complete -- whether its air-to-air refueling, formation flights or shipboard operations -- VMX-22 is cleared to begin operational testing.

"The V-22 flight test program continues to be one of the most rigorous, thorough and methodical programs in aviation history," said Mike Tkach, V-22 program director. "Since returning to flight in May 2002, we've accomplished more than 1,330 hours of flight."

On the West Coast, Osprey No. 9, a CV-22, flew its first open-air range electronic warfare flight on March 9 on China Lake's Electronic Combat Range. Initial assessments of the flight show the electronic warfare system performed as designed. The V-22 test team is developing the CV-22 at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., for future use by the U.S. Special Operations Command in long-range special missions, evacuations, and other contingencies.

A unit of The Boeing Company, Integrated Defense Systems is one of the world's largest space and defense businesses. Headquartered in St. Louis, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is a $27 billion business. It provides systems solutions to its global military, government and commercial customers. It is a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; the world's largest military aircraft manufacturer; the world's largest satellite manufacturer and a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense; NASA's largest contractor; and a global leader in launch services.

###

For further information:
Kirsti Dunn
(301) 866-2419
kirsti.dunn@boeing.com