Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II Stealth Fighter Completes First Flight

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FORT WORTH, Texas, Dec. 15 /PRNewswire/ -- The Lockheed Martin (NYSE: LMT) F-35 Lightning II lifted into the skies today for the first time, completing a successful inaugural flight and initiating the most comprehensive flight test program in military aviation history.

(Photos: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20061215/DAF034-a

http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20061215/DAF034-b)

"The Lightning II performed beautifully," said F-35 Chief Pilot Jon Beesley following the flight. "What a great start for the flight-test program, and a testimony to the people who have worked so hard to make this happen." The most powerful engine ever placed in a fighter aircraft -- the Pratt & Whitney F135 turbofan, with 40,000 pounds of thrust -- effortlessly pushed the F-35 skyward.

The flight of the conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) F-35 variant began at 12:44 p.m. CST at Lockheed Martin in Fort Worth, Texas, when the jet lifted off and began a climb-out to 15,000 feet. Beesley then performed a series of maneuvers to test aircraft handling and the operation of the engine and subsystems. He returned for a landing at 1:19 p.m. CST. Two F-16s and an F/A-18 served as chase aircraft.

The stealthy F-35 is a supersonic, multi-role, 5TH Generation fighter designed to replace a wide range of existing aircraft, including AV-8B Harriers, A-10s, F-16s, F/A-18 Hornets and United Kingdom Harrier GR.7s and Sea Harriers.

"The first flight of the F-35 Lightning II is an historic moment because, for the first time ever, we are seeing the dawn of an aircraft with all the 5TH Generation attributes -- including advanced stealth, fighter agility, sensor fusion and greatly improved supportability -- combined in an affordable package," said Ralph Heath, president of Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co. "The F-35 will be the most advanced and most capable multi-role fighter on the international market for many, many years to come."

Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and general manager of the F-35 program, said the aircraft has continued to meet or exceed expectations during its assembly and pre-flight checkouts. It has now embarked on a 12,000-hour flight-test program designed to validate tens of thousands of hours of testing already completed in F-35 laboratories. "The F-35 will enter service as the most exhaustively tested, most thoroughly proven fighter system in history," Crowley said. "And thanks to its all-digital design, an exceptionally talented international engineering team and the world's best assemblers and mechanics, the F-35 has completely rewritten the book on fighter assembly precision and quality."

The United States and eight international partners are involved in the F-35's funding and development. The U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps, and the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force and Royal Navy plan to acquire a total of 2,581 F-35s. Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Canada, Australia, Denmark and Norway also are partners in the program and are expected to add about 700 more aircraft to the total. F-35 sales to other international customers could push the final number of aircraft to 4,500 or beyond.

"We believe the F-35 is poised to become the world standard-bearer of fighter aircraft," said Tom Burbage, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and general manager of F-35 program integration.

Three versions of the F-35 are under development: a conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) variant for conventional runways, a short takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) variant for operating off small ships and near front-line combat zones, and a carrier variant (CV) for catapult launches and arrested recoveries on board the U.S. Navy's large aircraft carriers.

Lockheed Martin is developing the F-35 Lightning II with its principal industrial partners, Northrop Grumman and BAE Systems. Two separate, interchangeable F-35 engines are under development: the Pratt & Whitney F135 and the GE Rolls-Royce Fighter Engine Team F136.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 140,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2005 sales of $37.2 billion.

For additional information, visit our Web site:
http://www.lockheedmartin.com

An F-35 electronic media kit is available at:
http://www.lockheedmartin.com/wms/findPage.do?dsp=fec&ci=15965&rsbci=13151&fti=0&ti=0&sc=400

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