

Making History - F-35B Has First Flight. Short-Takeoff, Vertical-Landing Aircraft.

The most advanced version of Lockheed Martin Corp.'s F-35 Joint Strike Fighter made its first flight Wednesday, June 11, 2008, with Lockheed test pilot Graham Tomlinson at the controls. A milestone triggering the first of six production models, the F-35B short-takeoff and vertical-landing variant is to be the first to achieve initial operational combat capability, beginning with the U.S. Marine Corps in 2012. Three versions of the aircraft are planned.

Development of the F-35 marks an unprecedented cooperation between peace-keeping allies. An international co-development program consisting of the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, Italy's Air Force and Navy, as well as forces from the Netherlands, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Australia and Turkey, have joined the United States in the development of the aircraft, with Lockheed Martin and its principal industrial partners, Northrop Grumman and BAE Systems.

Pentagon Undersecretary for Acquisition John Young said the \$298.8 billion F-35 program "has many more steps ahead, but today's flight demonstrates the maturity and progress being made."

The purpose of the maiden flight was to check out basic characteristics, including engines and flying qualities. The F-35 program "is ahead of similar programs in terms of quality, software, testing and manufacturing readiness," says test pilot Tomlinson. "Everything has gone absolutely according to plan." He called the first flight, "perfect."

Edited from article by Tony Capaccio, Bloomberg News

