CH-53K King Stallion completes first sea trials in the Atlantic

By Victoria Falcon
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The CH-53K King Stallion completed a two-week period of sea trials in the Atlantic earlier this month. This was the first opportunity to see the aircraft working in a modern naval environment.

Testing took place on USS Wasp, a landing helicopter dock (LHD) amphibious assault ship operated by the US. Navy.

“I’m very pleased with how the ship tests went,” said Col. Jack Perrin, H-53 helicopters program manager. “We were able to assess the K taking off and landing day, night, and with night vision goggles and it performed extremely well.”

According to the CH-53K integrated test team, the sea trials are a series of tests to evaluate the performance of the aircraft at sea. Tests performed during the two weeks included: launch and recovery; rotor start and shutdown; blade fold; and shipboard compatibility testing — all in increasing wind speed and varying wind directions relative to the aircraft.

“The bulk of the testing was in launch and recovery,” said Perrin, “and we nailed it every time, no matter what the wind/sea conditions were. The CH-53K is now a ‘feet-wet’ warrior from the sea.”

Ship compatibility testing includes towing the aircraft around the deck and in the hangar, performing maintenance while aboard the ship, ensuring the aircraft fits in all the locations it needs to around the ship deck and hangar, and evaluating chandlery/tie-down procedures.

The CH-53K King Stallion continues to execute within the reprogrammed CH-53K timeline, moving toward completion of developmental test, leading to initial operational test and evaluation in 2021 and first fleet deployment in 2023-2024.

TOPGUN graduates first pilots to complete F-35C Lightning II course

By Lt. Cmdr. Lydia E. Bock
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Pilots from Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 125 “Rough Raiders” and VFA-147 “Argonauts” were the first TOPGUN students to complete the course in the F-35C Lightning II.

Maj. Derek Heinz from the Rough Raiders and Lt. William Goodwin, III from the Argonauts successfully completed the 13-week Navy Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor (SFTI) course at the Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center (NAWDC) at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada. The SFTI course, otherwise known as TOPGUN, is an individual-level training course loaded with classroom lectures and labs, as well as simulated and live-fly events that are focused on the newest advanced tactical recommendations, and designed to create newly-minted tactics instructors who are ready to return and train the fleet.

“Our focus on the students that go through TOPGUN is not limited to teaching them the tactics, techniques, and procedures that are required for them to successfully employ their aircraft, integrated into a larger force;” said NAWDC TOPGUN Department Head, Cmdr. Timothy Myers. “We are also in the business of teaching our graduates how to instruct other students so that when they go back to the Fleet, they are able to instruct at a very high level.”

For the last few years, NAWDC and TOPGUN have been working to develop the skill-sets, curriculum, and experienced instructors required to execute a syllabus that fully integrates F-35C tactics, techniques, and procedures. While all F-35C tactics instructors have completed the TOPGUN course previously, this is the first time TOPGUN has graduated students who are currently flying the Lightning II, utilizing a syllabus that has been developed, from the ground up, specifically for F-35C integrated operations. This was accomplished by the gradual introduction of F-35C tactics into the training curriculum for previous classes. The result is a cadre of highly-trained instructors executing a fully-integrated F-35C syllabus, providing well-rounded “graduate-level” training for the fifth-generation fighter to take back to the fleet.

“Graduating Strike Fighter Tactics Instructors allows us to accelerate learning by feeding TOPGUN training back to the fleet, elevating the lethality and survivability of both the individual aircraft as well as the Carrier Strike Group,” said Myers. “The Lightning II proved its value to the Navy during every phase of the TOPGUN course, and its integration with the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, E/A-18G Growler and E-2C/D Hawkeye demonstrated that the powerful combination of 4th and 5th generation fighters, with advanced electronic attack, and command and control, is a force-multiplier against advanced threats.”

Since completing the TOPGUN course last month, Heinz and Goodwin have returned to instruct and train the fleet in the latest TOPGUN tactics, techniques and procedures, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that pilots will have the requisite skillsets to effectively employ the Lightning II during its first operational deployment and beyond.

“Our focus is on assisting the SFTIs at the operational fleet squadron pushing the big picture tactics and ensuring that everything is ready to go for the first and subsequent F-35C