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Guided firing success paves way for Meteor missile production

Missile systems leader MBDA successfully test-fired its world-beating Meteor Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile on 6th March at the Vidsel Missile Test Range in Sweden. The firing follows on from previous successful trials undertaken in the UK and Sweden and is another significant event in the European six-nation Meteor project.

With between three and six times the kinematic performance of any current missile of its type, Meteor will provide the air forces of France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK with untouchable air dominance. Matched with high-end aircraft performance from the three platforms that Meteor will operate from (Typhoon, Rafale and Gripen), the six air forces will have a winning combination when the missile enters service.

The firing was carried out from a Saab Gripen aircraft against a MQM-107B 'Streaker' high-subsonic subscale aerial target. The missile test firing concludes a series of development firings to prove the overall performance of the missile and its various subsystems in terms of guidance, propulsion, data link and fuse.

The missile was rail-launched from the Gripen flying at 0.9 Mach and at an altitude of 18,000ft (5500m). Following the boost phase the missile successfully transitioned to its ramjet operation and accelerated to its operational speed. The seeker then acquired the target and tracked it through to intercept. During the flight the missile's data link successfully demonstrated communication between the missile and the firing aircraft.

The key to Meteor's outstanding performance is the rocket motor. For the first time a solid fuel ramjet is being used to propel a missile. Already proven in earlier test firings, the unique solid fuel throttleable ducted rocket gives Meteor the ability to maintain high speed all the way to the target aircraft, making evasion virtually pointless.

Dave Armstrong, MBDA's Meteor Multinational Project Director said: "We're obviously delighted that another test firing has gone so well. This follows on from the great progress we made last year and concludes the first phase of Meteor's development. Now with every parameter of the missile proven, definition of the pre-production standard of the missile can now be finalised. During 2008, together with our partners and suppliers, we'll be starting the pre-production industrialisation phase of the programme which will see the partner nations taking up their production options. This is a proud day for MBDA and the Meteor team".

Antoine Bouvier, MBDA's CEO, said: "Once again, my congratulations to the Meteor Team on another successful test firing. There is growing interest in this weapon system from around the world as it will provide a step change in air combat capability. This guided firing will give our partners and potential export customers further confidence in the product and our programme."

Notes to editors:

Located some 900km north of Stockholm in the Arctic Circle, the Vidsel missile test range is part of the Swedish Defence Materiel Administration Testing Directorate. It is the largest overland test range in Western Europe.

Meteor is being developed to meet the requirements of UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden for a next generation Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM) system with the capability to dominate medium and beyond visual range air combat. The missile will be integrated onto Europe's major platforms, Typhoon, Gripen and Rafale. It also has the potential to be integrated to the next generation combat platform, namely the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter.

The Meteor programme accesses the best technology and expertise across Europe. The contract was signed by the UK MoD's Defence Procurement Agency on 23rd December 2002 on behalf of all six nations. This contract covers all development and provides production options for each country.

Meteor equates to a significant change in capability that will lead to the development of new tactics and new concepts of operation for the European partners. Guided by an active radar seeker based on the enhanced technologies from the mature MBDA Aster and Mica missile programmes, the weapon is capable of engaging targets in all weathers and in the most severe electronic warfare environments. With Meteor the partner nations know that they have the best and that they will stay the best for many years to come; combat capability will be totally redefined.

The Meteor programme has been moving forward since last year's first air-launched development firings with Seeker Data Gathering and Electronic Protection Measure (EPM) data gathering flights having been conducted both in Sweden and the UK. Environmental Data Gathering flights, to provide aircraft environmental data for missile design, have also been completed on all three aircraft. Additionally, Reliability Growth Testing and Hardware in the Loop testing have been undertaken. In 2007 MBDA conducted a successful Control and Dispersion firing which tested the Propulsion Sub-system performance to the edge of its envelope.

Meteor is being developed by a multinational team led by MBDA, with Saab Bofors Dynamics of Sweden and INMIZE of Spain as principal partners. The development includes a network of European sub-contractors from the partner nations. The ramjet motor is developed by Bayern Chemie in Germany, now part of MBDA.

With an annual turnover exceeding €3 billion, a forward order book of over €13 billion and over 70 customers worldwide, MBDA is a world leading, global missile systems company. MBDA currently has 45 missile system and countermeasure programmes in operational service and has proven its ability as prime contractor to head major multi-national projects.

MBDA is jointly owned by BAE SYSTEMS (37.5%), EADS (37.5%) and FINMECCANICA (25%).

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