Lockheed Develops Rack to Make F-35A/C a Six-Shooter



Marines prepare F-35B Lightning II aircraft on the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp. The F-35B can't accommodate the new Sidekick weapons rack, as its weapons bay is too small, but the F-35C, the Navy's variant of the joint strike fighter, can. Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Benjamin F. Davella III

ARLINGTON, Va. — The builder of the F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter has designed a new weapons rack to enable the aircraft to carry two more missiles internally.

The new rack, called Sidekick, enables each of the two weapons bays of the Air Force F-35A and Navy carrier-capable F-35C to carry three AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) instead of the current two, for a total of six internally carried AMRAAMs.

Speaking May 1 to reporters at a Lockheed Martin media briefing, a company F-35 test pilot, Tony 'Brick' Wilson, said the rack was developed entirely with company internal research and development funds.

> *"The extra missiles add a little weight but are not adding extra drag."*
>
> *Tony 'Brick' Wilson, F-35 TEST PILOT*

The rack is not compatible with the vertical lift Marine Corps F-35B version, which has smaller weapons bay.

The F-35 can carry more AMRAAMs on external pylons, but Wilson pointed out that carrying two more internally preserves the stealth characteristics of the F-35.

“The extra missiles add a little weight but are not adding extra drag,” Wilson said.

Wilson also said the F-35 has the external structural capacity for hypersonic weapons should that be required in the future.

He also said the company, working with the Air Force Research Lab, has developed and installed on the F-35A – six years ahead of schedule – the Auto Ground Collision Avoidance System (AGCAS).

The AGCAS has “saved eight pilots’ lives,” Wilson said.

He said the AGCAS will be installed later on the F-35B and on the F-35C in 2021.