The Navy’s Super Hornet Block III Takes to the Skies



F288, the first Block III F/A-18 Super Hornet, closes its landing gear after performing a touch-and-go near Boeing’s St. Louis flight ramp. *BOEING / Mike Irvine*

St. LOUIS – The most advanced Super Hornet in history has completed its first flight, Boeing News Now said Sept. 10.

Boeing test pilots Ty “Grouch” Frautschi and Sam “Splat” Platt last week lifted off from Boeing’s St. Louis flight ramp and checkout center in the first combat-capable Block III F/A-18 Super Hornet.

“It was a good day. The jet flew great,” Frautschi said. “It is a real pleasure to fly and I know the Navy is looking forward to getting all this capability that Block III is going to bring to the fleet.”

The previous 28 F/A-18 Super Hornet deliveries to the U.S. Navy have been fighters for the Kuwait Air Force as outlined by the Foreign Military Sales process. Block III is a return to putting new fighters in U.S. Navy squadrons.

“It means a lot to me, I was in the Navy for 20 years,” Platt said. “The reason I like to do this job is to bring these airplanes back to the sailors I still care about.”

F/A-18 Block III capabilities include the advanced cockpit system (ACS) with a 10-inch-by-19-inch touch-screen display, enhanced networking, open mission systems, increased survivability and a 10,000-hour airframe. The ACS is the largest cockpit screen of any fighter in the world, shared with the F-15.

“It’s like the difference of a dial telephone and your cellphone,” Platt said. “All these integrated displays put on

a big piece of glass where you can really get an idea of what the sensors are doing and have a much more tactical display for the operator. It’s a revolutionary increase in capability.”

Block III capabilities were developed in partnership with the Navy. The flight is the result of years of work and hundreds of Boeing employees – a fact not lost on the test pilots.

“It’s a team effort. There’s a lot of preparation that goes into not just getting ready for the flight but building it and even earlier than that – the engineering and development,” Fraustchi said. “It is not a short list of activities to get to today, that’s for sure, and we appreciate everything they do to keep us safe.”

The first production Block III F/A-18F is construction number F288.