GOOD TO GO

SUPER HORNETS

Australia's first squadron of F/A-18F Super Hornet fighter jets is ready for duty following the arrival of four new aircraft at RAAF Base Amberley early in December.

Air Force's F/A-18F Super Hornets have reached initial operational capability status on time and on budget with the latest tranche of four Super Hornets touching down from the United States on 7 December.

The delivery of these aircraft has allowed the RAAF to declare the first squadron is on line and ready for operations – a major milestone for this very successful acquisition project.

Initial operational capability involved establishing a squadron of 12 aircraft with supporting training and maintenance systems – and the RAAF's Number 1 Squadron is the first to achieve that status.

This latest tranche also included the first aircraft to be operated by Number 6 Squadron, which retired its fleet of F-111s just a week earlier.

The aircraft departed from the Boeing assembly facility at St. Louis, Missouri, and, over a number of days, transited to RAAF Base Amberley via Travis Air Force Base, California, Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii and Anderson Air Force Base, Guam.

On this occasion, the United States Navy led the ferry mission, with support from Boeing. The two previous deliveries were conducted by RAAF pilots.

Importantly, this latest tranche of aircraft included Australia's first three Super Hornets that are pre-wired to accommodate Growler electronic attack capability.

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OPERATIONALLY READY

PERFORMANCE AND WARLOAD COMPARISON			
	F-111C	F/A-18E/F Super Hornet	F/A-18A/B Hornet
Empty Weight	21,537kg	13,864kg	11,200kg
Max Take-Off Weight	44,896kg	29,900kg	25,400kg
Internal Fuel	15,454kg	6,352kg	4,926kg
Dry Engine Thrust	120kN	124kN	98kN
Thrust w/afterburner	186kN	196kN	158kN
Max Speed	Mach 2.5	Mach 1.8	Mach 1.8
Combat Radius (strike mission)	1,475km	1,080km	535km
External Weapons Load	11,500kg	8,032kg	7,030kg

Although this capability has not been ordered as yet (and may never be), having the aircraft pre-wired to take the suite of equipment could ultimately save millions of dollars and a lot of time compared with retro-fitting the aircraft, if it is found to be desirable or necessary.

The last 12 of the RAAF's Super Hornets are being pre-wired, with this process costing about $35 million, while actually purchasing and fitting the Growler suite will cost in the region of $300 million.

The EA-18G Growler is a variant of the combat-proven F/A-18F Super Hornet Block II, and is designed to conduct airborne electronic attack missions.

It combines the capability of the combat-proven Super Hornet with the latest in reactive and pre-emptive jamming capabilities. EA-18G's vast array of sensors and weapons will provide the RAAF with a lethal and survivable weapon system to counter current and emerging surface-to-air and air-to-air missile threats, and capacity to disrupt enemy communications.

Growler is the US Navy replacement for its current electronic-warfare aircraft, the EA-6B Prowler.

The majority of Growler avionics are installed on a pallet in the gun bay and in two wingtip pods. Nine weapon stations provide unique flexibility for the carriage of weapons, jamming pods, and other stores to meet the needs for standoff jamming, escort jamming, time-critical strike or communications countermeasures.

A decision on whether Australia will upgrade to Growler capability could be made next year.

All 24 of the RAAF's F/A-18F Super Hornets will be delivered by the end of this year.


M7R - Rechargeable


MT7 - Tactical


H4 - Headlamp


M14 - Multi Featured


H7 - Focusing Headlamp


X21 - Light Cannon

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