



Around the world in 82 days

Two Boeing Super Hornets, supported by a lean Boeing-led team, circled the globe performing demonstrations and flying at key air shows

By John Hagan
Photos by Kevin Flynn

In January, a small Boeing-led team embarked on an ambitious assignment: Take two Super Hornets around the world, stopping to display the aircraft in countries that are potential Super Hornet customers, performing flight displays at major regional air shows and conducting demonstration flights for VIPs. The tour was a key element in Integrated Defense Systems' strategy to bolster international sales. Adding to the team's challenge was a requirement to minimize the spare parts and tools that traveled with the aircraft, minimize impact on the fleet and keep expenses low.

DAY 1 – LEMOORE, CALIF.

Darryl Lyons, St. Louis maintenance foreman, joins fellow Boeing employees Dan Straeter, Fred Anderson and Dave Wright at U.S. Navy Training Squadron VFA-122 here. The four perform acceptance inspections on two Super Hornet aircraft Boeing has leased for the globe-spanning trip. The jets are fine, no surprise. Next stop: Cecil Field, just outside of Jacksonville, Fla., to begin practice for upcoming air shows and VIP flights.

DAY 24 – CECIL FIELD, FLA.

Daily flight operations hit their peak with six flights completed. The flexibility of the team is fully utilized, as two of the flights are air show profiles, one a Navy pilot proficiency update, and three are VIP practice flights.

DAY 27 – ON THE WAY

After 12 days of flying, the team packs its equipment, loads the leased Omega KDC-10 tanker that will accompany it on the trip, refuels and departs on the next leg of the journey. Over the past 12 days the team has completed 45 flights, qualified two pilots for flying air show profiles and trained five Navy pilots on conducting VIP flights. At 7:30 a.m., the two Super Hornets and Omega KDC-10 launch for the Azores, an island chain in the Atlantic Ocean about 950 miles (1,500 kilometers) west of Lisbon. More than six hours later the aircraft land in heavy winds and rain.

DAY 28 – COPENHAGEN

After a 5.5-hour flight from the Azores, the aircraft land in Copenhagen. The team lands in cold weather—snow and ice everywhere—and the aircraft are towed into a hangar for a reception. Denmark is evaluating the Super Hornet for a future fighter requirement.

While in Copenhagen, four members of the team split from the main group to travel to Bangalore, India, to finalize preparations for the Super Hornets' participation in the Aero India biennial air show. Unfortunately, they have to travel through London just after a storm leaves 12 inches of snow on the ground, cancelling flights and delaying connections. One team member will have to wait a week before he sees all of his luggage again.

DAY 31 – SOUDA BAY, CRETE

After the reception in Copenhagen, it is time to pack and move again. The team arrives in Crete for an overnight stop before continuing to Qatar, in the Middle East. Refueling is hampered as a local farmers' strike blocks the roads, preventing fuel trucks from getting to the airfield.

DAY 32 – AL UDEID, QATAR

Another overnight stop finds the team sleeping in a tent at Al Udeid Air Base here. An air-conditioned hotel in Bangalore, the team's destination in India, is going to be great!

DAY 33 – YELAHANKA AIR BASE, BANGALORE, INDIA

The aircraft land midafternoon. The team is already into its second month of travel, but there's no time to reflect on the trip so far, as both Super Hornets are scheduled for flights tomorrow. And India is a potential Super Hornet customer.

At Aero India, the air show organizers have established a block of time each morning and afternoon for flight demonstrations. Consequently, manufacturers wanting to schedule separate VIP flights have to launch and recover them early in the morning, around lunchtime or late in the afternoon. Boeing pilots Mike Wallace and Ricardo Traven alternate slots flying the air show demonstration routines, and pilots from the U.S. Navy's VFA-122 Super Hornet squadron fly the VIPs. The team's Boeing maintainers launch and recover all flights.

The Super Hornet is the only tactical aircraft flying with external stores in the grueling, low-level air show demonstration routines. The aircraft is configured with representative AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles on the wingtips, AIM-120 AMRAAM missiles on each outboard wing pylon and an MK-83 inert bomb on each midboard pylon.

DAY 40 – YELEHANKA AIR BASE, BANGALORE, INDIA

Boeing hosts a former India astronaut, Rakesh Sharma, at the air show and provides him a VIP ride in the back seat of the Super Hornet. This is just one of the many VIP flights the team provides to showcase the Super Hornet's capabilities during the trip.

DAY 44 – PAYA LEBAR, SINGAPORE

Following completion of the Aero India, it is time for the team to head east, again. During nine flying days in Bangalore the



PHOTOS: (TOP) The Super Hornets are ready for flight after a stop in Souda Bay, Crete. **(MIDDLE)** Boeing air show pilot Mike "Sting" Wallace (right) discusses aircraft status with Dave Wright (far left) and Darryl Lyons prior to a flight in India. **(ABOVE)** John Kloppenburg, Customer Relations & Exhibits Team lead, greets onlookers at the Aero India air show.



PHOTOS: (TOP) Two Super Hornets from VFA-122 fly over the coast of Malaysia. **(MIDDLE)** Former India astronaut Sharma Rakesh prepares to fly the F/A-18F Super Hornet at the Aero India air show. **(ABOVE)** Pilot Ricardo Traven folds the wings of a Super Hornet as if to wave to the crowd at the Avalon Air Show in Australia after demonstrating the aircraft's abilities.

Super Hornets flew 32 flights with a peak rate of five per day. The team spends the night in Singapore en route to Australia, and its many appointments there.

DAY 45 – DARWIN, AUSTRALIA

The team lands in Darwin and drives three hours south, into the Outback, to arrive at RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territories. The Royal Australian Air Force will accept its new Super Hornets starting next year and the aircraft generate a lot of interest at the airfield.

While at Tindal, the team introduces the Super Hornet to RAAF personnel, completes air show currency flights and trains new U.S. Navy pilots who have joined the team on the intricacies of flying VIPs.

DAY 51 – RAAF BASE WILLIAMTOWN, AUSTRALIA

The team moves to the southeastern coast of Australia to RAAF Base Williamtown, near Newcastle, New South Wales. Here it will conduct VIP flights and fly additional air show profiles to maintain currency.

DAY 54 – RAAF BASE WILLIAMTOWN, AUSTRALIA

Australia's then-Minister of Defense, Joel Fitzgibbon, travels to Williamtown to meet the Boeing crew and holds a short news conference beside the Super Hornet. Fitzgibbon praises the aircraft and the capabilities it will bring to the Australia Defence Force.

DAY 59 – AVALON, AUSTRALIA

After 12 flights in five flying days in Williamtown, it is time to move to the Avalon airfield just outside of Melbourne, Victoria. This will be the site of the 2009 Airshow Down Under, which is an international showcase for all types of aircraft. This is the fourth time the Super Hornet has flown at this air show and it is always a highlight of the flying program.

The Super Hornets fly 18 flights in Avalon, a mixture of air show demonstrations and VIP profiles.



DAY 75 – PAGO PAGO, AMERICAN SAMOA

With air show and VIP flights complete, the team starts the long journey home with a 6.5-hour ferry flight to Pago Pago, capital of American Samoa, in the south Pacific. The aircraft cross the international date line during the flight: The team launches on Friday morning from Australia and lands in Pago Pago Thursday afternoon.

DAY 76 – HONOLULU

The team is back in the United States for the first time since January. There isn't much interest in touring the local area, though. Everyone is focused on getting back home.

DAY 78 – NAVAL AIR STATION LEMOORE, CALIF.

The team's two Super Hornets complete their around-the-world journey with a five-hour ferry flight from Hawaii to Lemoore. Cmdr. Chip Boogerd and Lt. Joshua Ensign have the distinction of flying the same aircraft on each ferry leg—each circling the world in one aircraft. The work is not over for the Boeing maintenance team, however, as control sticks added to the aft cockpit of each Super Hornet when the tour started in January need to be removed to return the jets to normal training squadron configuration.

DAY 80 – ST. LOUIS

Most of the Boeing team returns home when the Omega tanker stops in St. Louis.

DAY 82 – PATUXENT RIVER, MD.

The KDC-10 touches down at 11 a.m. on March 27, returning Dave Wright and Fred Anderson home. For many on the team, however, it will be a short stay at home, as some members are slated to travel to Naval Air Station Oceana, in Virginia Beach, Va., to support a Brazil Super Hornet flight evaluation in less than a week. For a few days though, the team can reflect on a highly successful world tour—two Super Hornets, 30,000 miles (48,300 kilometers), 144 flights and a mission completion rate of 100 percent. ■

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PHOTOS: (TOP) The eight Boeing maintenance personnel responsible for the world tour's 100 percent aircraft mission-success rate are shown flanked by Indian air force personnel. From left: Dan Straeter, Chuck Norton, Darryl Lyons, Fred Anderson, Gary Maynard, Dave Wright, Tom Meier and Rick Queen. **(ABOVE)** A VFA-122 Super Hornet flies over the New South Wales coast in Australia.