

Russian 1.44 to fly soon despite money shortage, says MAPO



MAPO MiG's MFI (Article 1.44) fifth generation fighter prototype will fly by early March, MAPO officials said at the aircraft's first public appearance on 12 January at the LII flight test centre at Zhukovsky, near Moscow. The aircraft taxied in front of an audience that included Russia's ministers of defence and economy.

Article 1.44 is a technology and airframe/propulsion concept demonstrator, rather than a weapons systems equipped prototype, of the "Article 1.42" originally conceived as Russia's next-generation fighter in the 1980s.

The 1.44 has not received government funding in the five years since its first high-speed taxi trials runs at Zhukovsky and has been grounded as a result. The aircraft still lacks airworthy hydraulic drives for its large foreplanes, which are controlled by an integrated digital fly-by-wire system, together with 14 other control surfaces. The drives will undergo frequency tests this month, and the aircraft is scheduled to fly soon after.

Curiously for an aircraft with stealth characteristics, the 1.44 has prominent external stores pylon under each wing, despite MAPO's claims of internal weapon carriage

for the aircraft. The fuselage shape and size indicates that the 1.44 could have a large fuel capacity.

While tight-lipped about the MFI's performance, Mikoyan general director Mikhail Korzhuyev claims "... it will be equal or superior to the Lockheed Martin F-22."

Powered by Lyulka-Saturn AL-41 thrust-vectoring engines, the 1.44 will have non-afterburning supersonic cruise speed and a greater range than the Sukhoi Su-27. The engines have been test-flown on Tupolev Tu-16 and Mikoyan MiG-25s reaching 1,080kt (2,000km/h) and a ceiling of more than 65,500ft (20,000m).

"The 1.44 may find its place in the Russian air force inventory", says Russia's defence minister Marshal Igor Sergeyev. Despite these claims, there are no immediate plans to open funding for further development. MAPO is thought to be lobbying for clearance to let China invest in the programme. Chinese officers attended the MFI presentation.

The moves to revive the 1.44 follow Sukhoi's unveiling of its rival S-37. Both projects were begun in the mid-1980s as an answer to US developments which culminated in the F-22. □

