

VOLVO AERO

Press Information

Gripen surpasses 100,000 flight hours Volvo Aero's engine safest in the world

The Gripen aircraft surpassed the 100,000-hour market during the week. It was during a flight over a snowy Östergötland landscape, with Saab's Chief Test Pilot Mats Thorbiörnsson and a Colonel in the South African Air Force at the controls, that the historic milestone was surpassed. Notably in this context is that during these 100,000 hours the Gripen was not involved in an engine-related accident or serious incident. This ought to be unique for all air forces worldwide.

Ever since its maiden flight, the Saab test team has carefully tracked each hour flown. The same strict logging was carried out by the Swedish Air Force, by Gripen's customers in Hungary, Czech Republic, pilot training in the UK and in South Africa.

As a result, it was known that this week the 100,000th hour was near. On the morning of January 28, the magic milestone was surpassed.

There was no plan for any big ceremony. In March, the first Gripen aircraft will be placed in active service in South Africa and the flight test program is in full swing.

At Volvo Aero, it was concluded that the first 100,000 hours was surpassed without a single engine-related accident or incident.

"I think this must be a hard record to beat for a single-engine application," says Rune Hyrefeldt, head of Military Program management at Volvo Aero.

The engine in the Gripen, the RM12, is based on the General Electric F404 that Volvo Aero's and GE's engineers adapted for the Gripen's needs in the 1980s. Since then, Volvo Aero has successively worked to reduce cost of ownership and increase safety:

- Among other features, the company developed an FADEC (Full Authority Digital Electronic Control) system that optimizes operations, provides the possibility to reduce fuel consumption and is simultaneously used for trouble-shooting.

- Volvo Aero has also designed a new intake component for the RM12 that facilitates lower costs and increased availability. (Previously, the engine required inspection every 50 flight hours, now this is carried out during regular service.)
- Volvo Aero has designed a new afterburner flameholder that drastically reduces operating costs and increases availability. The new flameholder does not have to be replaced as often as its predecessor and it can be switched out faster and easier.

“The sum of the first 100,000 hours with the RM12 in the air is that the engine meets all the requirements placed by FMV (Swedish Defense Material Administration) and the Air Force by a wide margin, in terms of operating costs, reliability and operational performance,” says Rune Hyrefeldt.

Work is under way at Volvo Aero on the last RM12 engine to the Swedish Air Force, Thereafter, production, assembly and testing will apply to engines destined for the South African Air Force. This work is expected to be concluded in 2011.

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