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Blackbird in the News

From: "Andrew Morris"
Subject: Blackbird in the News
Date: Thu, 30 Sep 1999 11:13:17 -0400

From Defence Systems Daily:

SR-71 "Blackbird" end research flights for 1999
30 September 1999

The 1999 four-flight series of the SR-71 "Blackbird" with a 41-foot-long test fixture mounted atop of the rear section of the aircraft was completed on September 27 at NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center, Edwards, Calif. The flights showed that the fixture barely impacted the SR-71's stability, handling and flying characteristics while soaring at Mach 3, three times the speed of sound.

"It flew like a scalded cat," said the SR-71 Flight Test Engineer Marta Bohn-Meyer. She said the plane was unbelievable in how it pushed to go faster. The SR-71 stopped short of reaching one test point of going over Mach 3 due to the failure of the liquid nitrogen system that was used to purge the test fixture. Without proper purge, there was concern of overheating the fixture's internal systems. This purge system has proven very effective in past flights, Tim Moes said, NASA Dryden's chief engineer for these research flights.

He added that the cause of the purge system failure is now well understood and procedures will be instituted to prevent this failure in the future. Although the two-hour flight did not reach Mach 3.2, the combined four-flight series proved that the SR-71 is a viable testbed for future technologies that need a high-speed, high-altitude flight environment.

Data obtained on the previous flight to Mach 3.0 can be confidently extrapolated to Mach 3.2. Unlike wind tunnels that are constrained by its walls, the SR-71 airplane flies in actual atmospheric conditions, such as moisture and temperatures, at extreme altitudes and speeds making it an ideal testbed for supersonic flight.

NASA's Revolutionary Concepts (RevCon) project is one example of possible future use of the SR-71 as a testbed. The RevCon project encourages the development of ideas that could lead to revolutionary experimental planes.

The Pulse Detonation Engine, one of the first RevCon projects, is a revolutionary approach for future high-speed jet propulsion. The engine will have fewer parts, yet greater propulsion efficiency, resulting in lower maintenance and direct operating costs. It will eventually be flown captive carry on Dryden's SR-71 "Blackbird" to speeds over Mach 3.

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