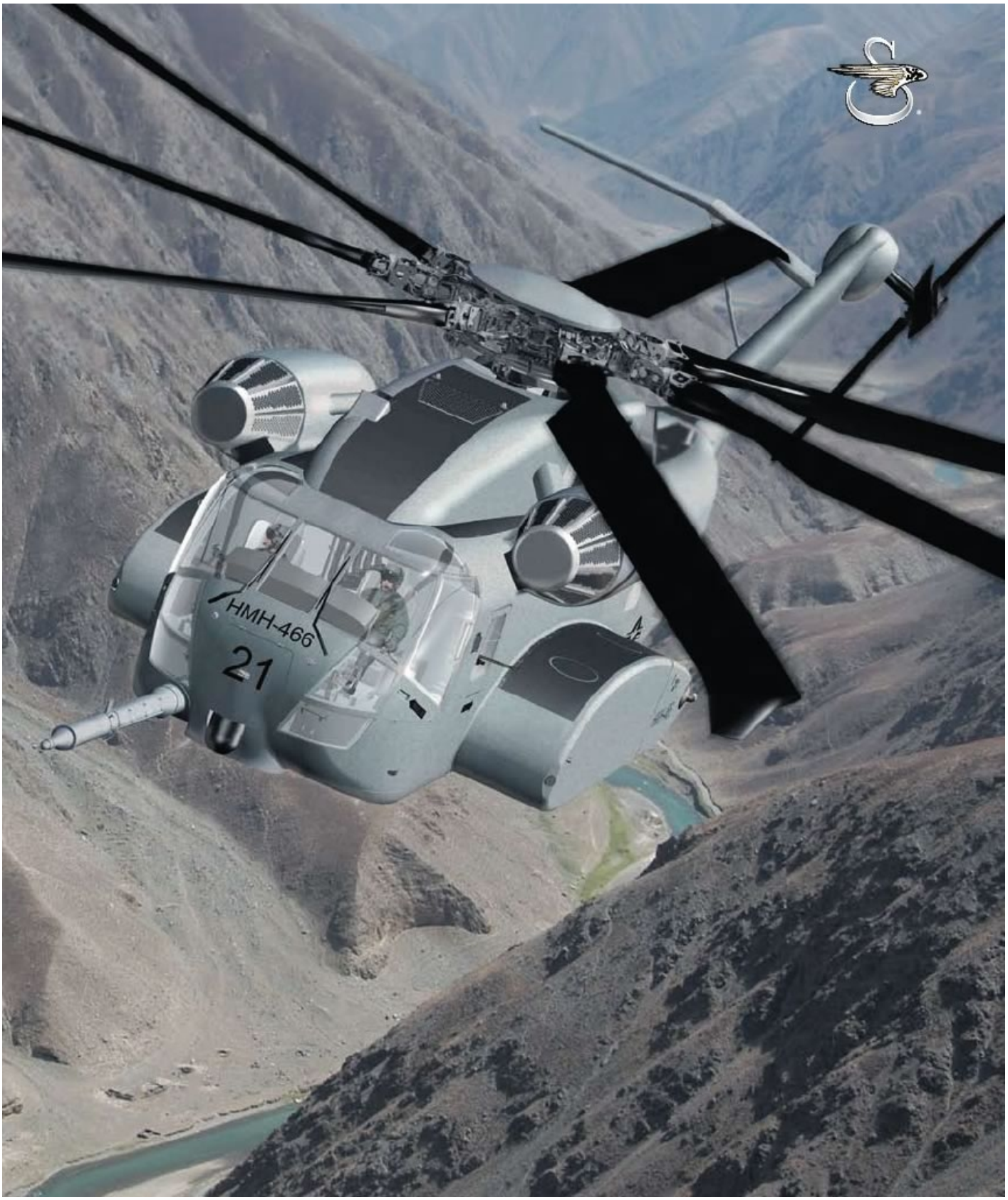
SECOND SIKORSKY CH-53K ‘ALMOST READY’ TO JOIN TEST CAMPAIGN

News / Manufacturer

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After a slow start, the Sikorsky CH-53K development project is gathering pace at West Palm Beach, Florida, with sixth test flights and counting since initial lift-off in late October and a second aircraft almost complete.

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The US Marine Corps announced this week that one of its own pilots flew the King Stallion, taking over from Sikorsky's test team for the first time.

Lt Col Jonathan Morel of USMC Air Test and Evaluation Squadron-21 took the first engineering and manufacturing development aircraft (EMD-1) on the 1.5h trial run to assess its mechanical stability and flight control responses in hover.

Col Hank Vanderborght, the service's programme chief for heavy-lift helicopters, says in a statement that the second aircraft is almost ready to join the 2,000h flight test campaign, and the wider programme remains on track to achieve initial operational capability in 2019.

Built to replace the long-serving Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion, the K-model has three times the lifting capacity of its predecessor and is essentially a new aircraft with new engines, new fuselage structure, new rotor system, new avionics and fly-by-wire flight controls.

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Sikorsky CH-53K

US Marine Corps

Sikorsky engineers have carried out extensive modelling and simulation of how the aircraft is supposed to handle, and Morel says it came “very close” to the mark during his flight, with “stable and predictable” handling qualities.

The development programme was initiated in 2005 and then delayed, but the service is now confident of hitting its revised initial readiness goal in 2019 and is intent on buying 200 total aircraft, as planned.

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Congress reduced programme funding by $40 million in Fiscal 2016 to $592 million due to “programme execution,” probably to account for delays in achieving first flight this year.

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