

Shore thing!

Boeing to use its rotorcraft production expertise in bid to supply U.S. Navy with an advanced hovercraft

By Marc Sklar

The U.S. Navy's next 'air'craft may not take off with the head-snapping speed of an F/A-18 Super Hornet leaving the deck of a carrier. But it will still turn heads.

Flying on a cushion of air just feet above the water and land, this hovercraft, or air cushion vehicle, will transport troops, equipment, supplies and weapons from ships to landing zones. The Ship to Shore Connector is the Navy's proposed replacement for its Landing Craft Air Cushion hovercraft that has been operational for more than two decades.

Boeing—with its large-scale systems integration expertise, rotorcraft production and product life-cycle support—has teamed with shipbuilder Marinette Marine Corp. to bid for the project.

"The Marines and Army forces that will depend on the new craft are incorporating heavier vehicles into their operating units," said Richard McCreary, chief executive of the shipbuilding firm. "They need higher speeds for increased operational tempos, and the ability to perform in even more hostile environments."

Carried in the belly of amphibious assault ships, the Ship to Shore Connector will be able to operate independent of tides, water depth, underwater obstacles, ice, mud or beach gradient. Its ability to move over water and land gives it flexibility to be used for everything from beach assaults to humanitarian efforts. The Navy's current hovercraft were deployed to the Arabian Gulf in Operation Desert Storm and have been used in Haiti earthquake relief missions.

The Boeing and Marinette team also includes Oceaneering International Inc., which will provide craft support and design and has experience with current ship-to-shore connector maintenance for the Navy, and Griffon Hoverwork, a U.K. hovercraft designer and builder for more than 40 years.

"It's a powerful combination," McCreary said of the team, which must build a vehicle to meet requirements that substantially exceed what the Navy's current hovercraft can do.

Greg Peterson, program manager for the Ship to Shore Connector, is confident the proposal from Boeing and Marinette will meet the Navy's needs. "From the drive system to the lift system to the pilot station to training and everything in between," he said, "our systems individually and as a whole deliver more for the customer." ■

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION:

The proposed Ship to Shore Connector air cushion vehicle will transport troops, equipment, supplies and weapons systems to landing zones for the U.S. Navy.

BOEING AND MARINETTE MARINE CORP.

