

The Truth about the Osprey

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Headquarters Marine Corps -- Unlike most of the V-22 critics, I have actually flown the MV-22 Osprey.

I flew hundreds of hours in this remarkable aircraft when I commanded the Marine Corps' test and evaluation squadron 2003-2006, and I am obliged to tell the truth.

The truth is the Osprey is the most thoroughly tested aircraft in the history of aviation for one fundamental reason: the safety of its passengers. Our Nation expects that the military will use the best engineered, maintained, and operated equipment available. Our troops deserve it. The Osprey we are flying today is just that.

Some critics say that we haven't flown the Osprey in the desert. Not true. My squadron flew in desert environments on multiple occasions totaling months of tests. The squadron now in Iraq

completed several desert training periods prior to deploying. In fact, we just had another squadron of MV-22s in California and Arizona doing more of the same. Not only can the Ospreys fly in the desert, the aircraft's advanced technology makes it easier than in any other rotorcraft to land in brownout conditions.

Other critics point out that the MV-22 does not have a forward-firing weapon, but none puts this in context: no medium or heavy lift aircraft in the U.S. inventory has a forward-firing weapon. MV-22s flying in Iraq have ramp-mounted machine guns which have become the standard on our aircraft in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, based on the threat. That, and the inherent capabilities of the aircraft (range, speed and altitude), give the MV-22 the ability to reduce susceptibility and vulnerability to many threats.

The MV-22 has limited visibility through the cabin windows, much like the CH-46 and the CH-53E, but what most critics do not know is that the troop commander, who rides in the back of the Osprey, has unparalleled situational awareness from the on-board precision navigation system with moving maps and a significant communications capability. These capabilities are not an option in existing Marine Corps aircraft.

The MV-22 is the most maneuverable medium lift assault support platform in the world. Conventional helicopters are limited to standard rotary wing tactics and airspeeds, while the MV-22 has the ability to fly like a turboprop airplane as well as a conventional helicopter. As an airplane, it can climb or descend at a significantly higher rate than any helicopter and transit at



A line of V-22 Ospreys warm-up before joining 16 others in flight over the Station. According to Col. Glen M. Walters, Marine Tiltrotor Test and Evaluation Squadron-22 commanding officer, the sheer number of aircraft flying at one time is a testament to the squadron's ability. Photo by: Lance Cpl. Jeffrey A. Cosola

much higher speeds. The MV-22 can also get in and out of landing zones faster than any other medium lift helicopter.

Vortex Ring State (VRS) is a phenomenon experienced by all rotorcraft--not just the Osprey. While the MV-22 is the only aircraft with a warning system that alerts pilots to VRS conditions, it is the least susceptible to this phenomenon. Additionally, because of the inherent flight characteristics of a tilt-rotor, and with the execution of a routine procedure, the MV-22 can fly out of VRS almost instantaneously by simply tilting the nacelles forward and flying out of the condition. In a helicopter the procedure is much more involved.

Perhaps we should judge the MV-22 on its current performance, not on its past.

To argue whether the aircraft is worth the money spent is an unending debate. To the injured Marine or soldier whose life is saved due to the unparalleled capabilities of the MV-22, I would posit that the aircraft is worth every penny.

Walters heads the Marine Corps' aviation plans section in the Pentagon and previously commanded Marine Tiltrotor Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron 22 (VMX-22). This commentary first appeared in the North County Times (Calif.) on Nov. 15.