



Metaltec Precision Engineering is continuing its successful partnership with the GE Rolls-Royce Fighter Engine Team to supply assembly tooling for the JSF F136 engine.

As we advance into the third year of our relationship, Metaltec thank the Fighter Engine Team for their ongoing support and congratulate them on their progress in this significant defence program.



GE Rolls-Royce
Fighter Engine Team



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Spot-on: The best machinery makes even small companies preferred suppliers

Small firm to make a mark in the big time

Gregor Ferguson

THIS year production work for the nine-nation Joint Strike Fighter starts to climb significantly. This will be the trigger for a small, Melbourne-based company to start ramping up deliveries of precision tooling to one of the main production sites in England.

Metaltec is a relatively small firm by global aerospace standards: it employs just more than 100 people and achieved sales of \$17 million last year. But in partnership with Sydney-based Broens Industries, it is a preferred supplier to one of the three JSF partners, BAE Systems in England, to provide production tooling for the rear fuselage, tail plane and twin vertical stabilisers.

In 2006 Metaltec and Broens established a joint venture company, Aero-tech International, to win the recurring contracts to build this production tooling. They have already delivered the first set of equipment to prove that the tooling works, and that the companies can deliver it and support it reliably. There is no room for errors or uncertainty in this program.

Winning a contract to manufacture production tooling for an aircraft program such as the JSF is a significant victory for Metaltec. Precision tooling is vital for two reasons: achieving tight tolerances means parts can be made lighter, which reduces the aircraft's weight and operating costs; and it means the components fit together correctly without needing to be re-worked, making assembly much quicker and cheaper. When the JSF builds up to production rates of one aircraft each working day, any delay could be expensive. Getting the tooling right is one of the keys to the success of the entire project.

In parallel, Metaltec is close to finishing another precision tooling job for Rolls-Royce, which with General Electric is developing an alternative engine for the JSF, the F136. The company is manufacturing assembly and disassembly tooling for the new engine.

"Feedback received from Rolls-Royce has been very positive in terms of

our responsiveness and performance to key metrics, and we aim to develop and foster this relationship into the future," Metaltec managing director Paul Hudson says.

The company has delivered more than 130 sets of tools to Rolls-Royce during the past 15 months to allow them to meet tight engine production schedule requirements. "We have worked hard to develop collaborative international working relationships from our manufacturing base in Victoria and are pleased with the results of the F136 tooling contract," Hudson says.

While there have been complaints that Australian companies' share of the JSF program has been disappointing — about \$220 million for 25 companies — Hudson points out the project is building up progressively and Australian participants expect significant further work to follow. Most contracts awarded so far have been for the system development and demonstration phase, during which 19 aircraft will be built during about four years.

Once low-rate initial production gets under way, then full-rate production, suppliers will be busy indeed. Thirty-two aircraft will be built in LRIP batch four, starting next year; five years later, in 2014, annual production will soar to 205, then climb even higher to 230 the following year.

The 100 aircraft Australia plans to buy will account for just five months' production.

Hudson declines to comment on what this means for Metaltec specifically: negotiations for future contracts are still under way. However, a letter of intent between Lockheed Martin and the Defence Materiel Organisation suggests Australia's tooling industry alone is set to reap as much as \$150 million from the JSF program.

Metaltec sits atop a network of other small, precision manufacturers. Most of them got their start manufacturing tooling for the automotive and resource sectors, and it has been Metaltec that opened up new markets in defence and aerospace, with work flowing back down to its supplier base, says Hudson.