



# F/A-18A/B Classic Hornet

The Boeing F/A-18A/B Classic Hornet is a multi-role fighter aircraft, capable of air-to-air and air-to-ground missions – an integral part of Australia’s air combat capability.

While the Hornet was originally developed for the US Navy and Marine Corps, the Australian Government purchased 75 aircraft in 1981 – 57 single-seat A-variant fighters and 18 two-seat B variant operational training aircraft – to replace the Royal Australian Air Force’s (RAAF) Dassault Mirage III fighters.

The Classic Hornet entered service with the RAAF in 1985. The first two jets – A21-101 and 102 – arrived at Williamtown after an epic 15-hour non-stop trans-Pacific flight from Naval Air Station Lemoore in California. The remaining 73 aircraft were assembled in Australia between 1985 and 1990 by Boeing heritage company Government Aircraft Factories (which became Aerospace Technologies of Australia, ASTA, in 1987). A large number of the Hornets’ components were manufactured locally by ASTA, Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (another Boeing heritage company) and 15 other companies.

In 1988, No.3, No.75 and No.77 RAAF squadrons and No.2 Operational Conversion Unit completed conversion to the Hornet, commanded by No. 81 Wing at RAAF Base Williamtown.

## TECHNICAL DATA: Boeing F/A-18A/B Classic Hornet

Power plant	Two low-bypass F404-GE-400 turbofans (7,258kg thrust each)
Span	12.4m (40 ft)
Length	17.1m (56 ft)
Height	4.7m (15 ft)
Empty weight	10,660kg (23,500 pounds)
Loaded weight	20,412kg (45,000 pounds)
Maximum speed	2,200 kph (1,367 mph)
Range	2,700 km (1,678 mi)
Service ceiling	13,716m (45,000 feet)
Armament	AIM-120 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile; AIM-132 Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile; Practice, Conventional and Laser-Guided Bombs; Joint Direct Attack Munition and Laser JDAM; AGM-158 Joint Air-To-Surface Stand-Off Missile; and M61 Nose-Mounted 20mm Cannon

The Hornet has been at the core of Australia’s frontline defence, deployed as part of Australia’s support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in the Persian Gulf in the 1990s and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014 – the first wartime deployments of Australian fighter aircraft since the Korean War and the first strike missions flown by Australian pilots since the Vietnam conflict.

From 2015 to 2017, a detachment of Hornets was deployed to the Middle East and struck ISIL targets as part of Operation OKRA. RAAF Hornets have also protected a number of high-profile events and targets in Australia and overseas.

The RAAF ensured fleet effectiveness through major system and structural upgrades completed during the multiphase Air 5376 Hornet Upgrade Program (HUG). BDA was the HUG prime contractor and also led the Hornet Industry Coalition. Through the upgrades, the fleet’s capability was significantly enhanced, allowing it to maintain regional air and ground superiority through improved lethality, survivability and interoperability with allied air forces.

After 36 years of distinguished service, the RAAF’s fleet of 71 Hornets is being progressively withdrawn as the Australian Defence Force transitions to the F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters.

In August 2017, Boeing’s original 2010 maintenance contract was extended until the fleet’s retirement, scheduled for December 2021. In July, 2020, Boeing honoured the last deeper maintenance to be completed on the Hornets at RAAF Base Williamtown.

Today, just 19 Hornets remain in operation at No.75 Squadron at RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory. Of the remaining 52 aircraft, 20 have been sold to the Royal Canadian Air Force, eight have been retained for heritage purposes and the rest will be disposed of as required.

