

# *Dust Devils*

## Showcase New Technology

By Joe Cupido and Wendy Karppi

Photos by Joe Cupido

When you hear the name China Lake, Calif., chances are the first thing that comes to mind is the long heritage of testing and development of cutting-edge weapons systems that began in 1943. The tradition continues today at what is now known as Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS), China Lake. Less well known is the Naval Weapons Test Squadron, China Lake. Formerly the NAWS Aircraft Department, the test squadron, known as the *Dust Devils*, stood up on 8 May 1995, and provides flight and ground test support for the fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft

used in testing weapons and weapons systems at China Lake.

On 9 and 10 October 1997, the *Dust Devils* opened their doors to Navy and Marine tactical aviators and commands for the inaugural Developmental Weapons Symposium, designed to familiarize the fleet with the China Lake weapons programs. Almost 100

attendees from across the country enjoyed static displays, briefs by subject matter experts and tours of the testing ranges and facilities. Demonstration flights in various F/A-18 *Hornet* models—including one that is unique to the *Dust Devils*, an F/A-18D outfitted with E/F *Super Hornet* avionics—provided visiting aviators first-hand exposure to many





missile systems, such as the AIM-9X Sidewinder, Joint Stand-Off Weapon, Joint Direct Attack Munition and Advanced Tactical Information Management System.

The *Dust Devils* plan to conduct the symposium



annually, creating a new tradition that will continue to give tactical aviators the unique opportunity to get a sneak preview of the weapons of the future. ✈️

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A 35-foot-tall gorilla captured the attention of arriving guests at the first annual Developmental Weapons Symposium hosted by the Naval Weapons Test Squadron (NWTS), China Lake, Calif. Briefs by subject matter experts—such as Lt. Todd Hickerson, Joint Direct Attack Munition project officer, above—and static displays, below, familiarized participants with the weapons programs in progress at China Lake. Demonstration flights in various NWTS F/A-18 models, top, and an F/A-18D outfitted with E/F model avionics, opposite, allowed visiting aviators unique hands-on experience with several missile systems.

