

## “MOST EXPENSIVE FIGHTER IN HISTORY” -- THE MAKING OF A MYTH

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The Air Force is developing a stealthy fighter called the F-22 **Raptor**. It is the **only** stealthy air-superiority fighter the U.S. is developing. The Navy’s **F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet** is a fighter, but it isn’t stealthy. The Joint Strike Fighter is stealthy, but it isn’t an air-superiority fighter. Unfortunately, the F-22 is getting caught up in the same media myth-making that did in the B-2 bomber. Remember the “two-billion-dollar bomber”? It actually costs about a quarter of that amount to build, but you’d never know **if to** read the coverage. Now the same sloppiness is beginning to infect coverage of F-22, which is routinely described as “the most expensive fighter in history.” In fact, the **New York Times** recently called it “the most expensive jet in history.”

It’s true that F-22s are expected to cost \$83 million per plane to produce, whereas the F-15s they are replacing were expected to cost about one-tenth that amount (\$8.2 million) when they were at a similar stage of development in the late 1960s. But the problem isn’t the plane, it’s inflation. Ford Mustangs sold in the late sixties for \$2700, Corvettes for \$4200. Today a Mustang sells for \$25,000 and a Corvette for \$45,000. No one notices the change, because incomes have gone up even more. When’s the last time you heard this year’s Ford Mustang described as “the most expensive Mustang in history?”

There has been cost growth in the F-22 program even when the effects of inflation are removed (see chart). But look at what drove that growth. When the Air Force planned to buy 750 planes at 72 per year in 1985, each one was expected to cost \$50 million to build. When the rate went down to 48 per year in 1990, the cost zoomed to \$63 million per plane. When production shrank to 648 in 1991 at 48 per year, each plane went up to \$70 million. When production was slashed again in 1994 to 438 planes, the cost of each rose to \$75 million. And when the buy was cut to 339 and the rate to 36 in 1997, the cost hit \$83 million.

Now here’s the good news: if the production run is restored to the original 750 planes, at a rate of 60 per year, the cost of producing each plane falls nearly 20%. That’s something worth thinking about, since the Air Force’s real requirement for F-22s is actually 762 -- almost exactly the original production goal.

### F-22 Average Production Cost Per Plane

