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Russia Unveils T-72B3 at Zapad-2017 Exercise

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The Russian T-72B3 tanks have been tested during Zapad 2017 Russian-Belarusian strategic exercise. This is the first time the tanks were tested in a large-scale training event. The first batch of 20 upgraded vehicles entered service with the Western Military District of the Russian Army in February.

The production of the latest version of T-72 main battle tank (MBT) started last year. The vehicle is equipped with more powerful engines and automatic gear transmission, as well as a control and power unit automation system. It is fitted with a modernized fire control system and a rear-view camera. The tank also gained new protection, consisting of composite armor and anti-cumulative screens. It is equipped with 1130 horsepower engines and new defensive elements, including on board screens with built-in Relikt dynamic defense modules and latticed anti-cumulative engine transmission compartment screens. The propulsion unit control system allows the crew to control the T-72B3 with the help of a display.

The vehicle's weight is about 45 tons. Crew: 3 men, including a driver, a commander and a gunner. The new V-92S2F engine develops a maximum power output of 1,130hp. The power-plant provides a maximum road speed of 60km/h and a maximum range of 550km.

The armament suite includes a new smoothbore 125mm 2A46M-5 gun equipped with the Sosna-U sighting system with day/night and all weather combat capability. Range: up to five kilometers. The Sosna-U sight includes a second-generation thermal imaging camera, laser range finder and a channel for missile guidance. The vehicle is also fitted with a digital ballistic computer.

The T-72B3 can fire a range of auto-loaded ammunition, including armor-piercing discarding sabot (APDS), high-explosive fragmentation (HEF) and high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT), as well as 9M119 Refleks (NATO codename: AT-11 Sniper) guided anti-tank missiles. The AT-11 Sniper missile has a maximum range of 4,000m and can engage tanks fitted with explosive reactive armor. A total of 45 rounds are carried, 22 rounds are stored in the autoloader and ready to use, while remaining are stored inside the hull.

The secondary armament includes a co-axial 7.62mm PKTM machine gun and a roof-mounted 12.7mm NSV heavy machine gun controlled manually by the vehicle commander. The turret is also mounted with a bank of eight smoke grenade dischargers.

The T-72B3M tank is equipped with radio systems for encrypted digital voice and data transfer, snorkels for deep fording, and a built-in blade for self-entrenching.

According to the design, the driver's cab is at forward hull, fighting compartment in the centre and the power-pack at the rear. The new Relikt explosive reactive armor (ERA) offers superior protection against shaped charges, tandem warheads, *armor-piercing fin-stabilized discarding-sabot (APFSDS)* rounds, anti-tank guided missiles, as well as low-velocity and high-velocity missiles. The side skirts are hinged with large flat ERA modules. The T-72B3 is fitted with armor plates on each side at the front of the hull and wire cage armor at the rear part to increase protection of the engine compartment against rocket-propelled grenades. The vehicle is equipped with an overpressure-type nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) protection system.

The tank features torsion bar suspension and running gear on either side of the hull, with six road wheels with the idler at forward and drive sprocket at the rear. The inside of the track is supported by three return rollers. The first, second and sixth road wheel stations are installed with shock-absorbers, while the upper parts of the suspension are protected by rubber skirts. The

vehicle can negotiate a gradient of 60% and side slope of 40% and can ford at a maximum depth of 5m with preparation.

This year, the T-72B3 set an all-time tank biathlon record with the first Russian crew achieving the best time - 19 minutes 10 seconds without a single target miss. The record was set during the International Army Games that took place in August at Russia's Alabino military training centre.

According to the plans, all T-72 tanks will be converted to the B3 standard. The T-72B3 is to be the backbone of Russian armor fleet till the new Armata MBT enters in service. The Russian Defense Ministry purchased several hundred T-72B3 tanks, receiving the initial 20 earlier this year.