Swiss solar-flight bid to take off for first test flight

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The aircraft dubbed Solar Impulse takes off with test pilot Markus Scherdel on board in 2009 at Duebendorf airport near Zurich. The Solar Impulse aircraft, a Swiss bid to fly around the world on solar energy, will make its first test flight Wednesday at a military airbase in western Switzerland, organisers said.

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After several delays due to unfavourable weather conditions, the flight by prototype is now scheduled at 9.00 am (0700 GMT) on April 7, said a spokesman from the project co-founded by Swiss pilot and explorer Bertrand Piccard and engineer Andre Borschberg.

Wednesday's flight at Payerne airbase is expected to last around one and

a half hours, reaching an altitude of about 1,000 metres (3,280 feet), the organisers added in a statement.

The prototype, which is slightly smaller than the plane that will undertake the round-the-world flight, has a wingspan comparable to that of an Airbus A340 airliner but weighs as little as a family-sized car at only 1,600 kilogrammes (3,527 pounds).

It had briefly taken off for the first time in December for a controlled 400 metre hop about one metre above the runway.

The tests are due to build up to a first non-stop 36 hour flight through darkness, followed by a five-stage flight around the world in 2012.

More information: Huge solar powered plane takes to the air (w/ Video) - www.physorg.com/news189322240.html