

USAF vehicle breaks record for hypersonic flight

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In this image provided by the U.S. Air Force an X-51A Waverider rides under the wing of a B-52 Stratofortress Dec. 9, 2008. A similar X-51A successfully launched from a B-52 Stratofortress, Wednesday May 26, 2010. The Rocketdyne-built air breathing scramjet engine accelerated the vehicle to Mach 6. It was the longest supersonic combustion ramjet-powered hypersonic flight to date. (AP Photo/US Air Force - Mike Cassidy)

An experimental aircraft has set a record for hypersonic flight, flying more than 3 minutes at Mach 6 - six times the speed of sound.

The X-51A Waverider was released from a B-52 Stratofortress off the southern California coast Wednesday morning, the Air Force reported on its website. Its scramjet engine accelerated the vehicle to Mach 6, and it flew autonomously for 200 seconds before losing acceleration. At that point the test was terminated.

The Air Force said the previous record for a hypersonic scramjet burn was 12 seconds.

"We are ecstatic to have accomplished many of the X-51A test points during its first hypersonic mission," said Charlie Brink, an X-51A program manager with the Air Force Research Laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

"We equate this leap in engine technology as equivalent to the post-World War II jump from propeller-driven aircraft to [jet engines](#)," Brink said.

The Waverider was built for the Air Force by Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne and Boeing Co.

Joe Vogel, Boeing's director of hypersonics, said, "This is a new world record and sets the foundation for several hypersonic applications, including access to space, reconnaissance, strike, global reach and commercial transportation."

Four X-51A cruisers have been built for the [Air Force](#), and the remaining three will be tested this fall.

"No test is perfect," Brink said, "and I'm sure we will find anomalies that we will need to address before the next flight."

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