

Personal jetpack gets flight permit for manned test

August 13 2013



A model stands next to a newly developed personalised jetpack in Christchurch, New Zealand, pictured August, 2013. Authorities have issued a permit allowing manned test flights of the gadget.

The New Zealand developers of a personalised jetpack said Tuesday that aviation regulators have issued the device with a flying permit, allowing for manned test flights.

Martin Aircraft chief executive Peter Coker said the certification was a

significant milestone in the development of the jetpack, which the company hopes to begin selling next year.

"For us it's a very important step because it moves it out of what I call a dream into something which I believe we're now in a position to commercialise and take forward very quickly," Coker told AFP.

The jetpack is the brainchild of inventor Glenn Martin, who began working on it in his Christchurch garage more than 30 years ago.

Inspired by childhood television shows such as "Thunderbirds" and "Lost in Space", Martin set out in the early 1980s to create a jetpack suitable for everyday use by ordinary people with no specialist pilot training.

His jetpack consists of a pair of cylinders containing propulsion fans attached to a free-standing carbon-fibre frame.

The pilot backs into the frame, straps himself in and controls the wingless jetpack with two joysticks.

While the jetpack's concept is simple enough—Time magazine likened it to two enormous leaf blowers welded together—fine-tuning it into an aircraft that is safe and easy to use has been a lengthy process.



A personal jetpack developed by Martin Aircraft Company with a pilot strapped in place, pictured August 2013. The personal flying machines are to cost an estimated \$150,000-\$200,000 when they go on sale.

Coker said the latest prototype, the P12, incorporated huge design improvements over earlier versions.

"Changing the position of the jetpack's ducts has resulted in a quantum leap in performance over the previous prototype, especially in terms of the aircraft's manoeuvrability," he said.

Coker said a specialised version of the jetpack designed for the military and "first responder" emergency crews such as firefighters should be ready for delivery by mid-2014.

A simpler model aimed at the general public is expected to be on the market in 2015.

The price of your own personal flying machine is estimated at US\$150,000-250,000, although Coker said the cost was likely to come down over time.

It comes with a rocket-propelled parachute if anything goes wrong.

In May 2011, a remote control Martin jetpack carrying a dummy pilot soared 1,500 metres (5,000 feet) above the South Island's Canterbury Plains as its creator watched anxiously from a helicopter hovering nearby.

The New Zealand Civil Aviation Authority said the [jetpack](#) had now been issued with an experimental flight permit for development test flying, which allows someone to pilot the aircraft.

It said the test flights would be subject to strict safety requirements, with flights not allowed any higher than 20 feet (six metres) above the ground or 25 feet above water.

The flights are also limited to [test](#) areas over uninhabited land.

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Citation: Personal jetpack gets flight permit for manned test (2013, August 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-personal-jetpack-flight.html>

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