

Drones swoop into electronics show as interest surges

January 7 2015, by Rob Lever



Attendees look at the Parrot BeBop Drone Quadcopter with Skycontroller, January 6, 2015 at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada

On a dusty stretch of Nevada desert, a quadcopter drone kicks up a small cloud as it takes off. It then trails its operator on a drive across the flat terrain, filming the motion from a short distance above.

The AirDog drone was designed to capture the intensity of extreme

sports that have been difficult to access—surfing, skiing, off-road biking and similar activities.

"We felt we could change the way video is captured in action sports," said Agris Kipurs, co-founder of AirDog, created by a group of Latvian engineers and now based in California, which is starting beta-testing on its products later this year.

AirDog, one of dozens of drones being shown at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) this week in Las Vegas, is aiming for "an unassisted experience, so all you need is the tracking device on your wrist," Kipurs told AFP during a demonstration in the desert outside Las Vegas.

Drones are showing up in a variety of shapes and sizes at the huge electronics fair, which has for the first time a space dedicated to "unmanned systems."

More than a dozen companies are displaying the flying devices, for uses ranging from remote-controlled toys to professional filmmaking to industrial and agricultural applications.

The Hexo+ drone from Franco-American Squadrone System is another drone on display that can be pre-programmed to follow and film a person or object from any conceivable angle using a smartphone.

In a similar category, the show got a look at the Nixie drone, a flying camera which launches from one's wrist and won a competition last year sponsored by Intel for wearable technology.

"We think drones have a possibility to change our lives in positive ways," said Intel chief executive Brian Krzanich at a CES keynote speech where he demonstrated Intel-powered drones from Ascending Technologies

that navigated obstacles on stage.

Fighters, micro drones

South Korean-based Byrobot is showing its "drone fighter," which enables its users to simulate aerial combat with infrared signals to fire at enemy aircraft.

When one of the drones is hit, its lights flash and hand controller vibrates, signalling it is downed, according to the company, which offers an optional camera with the device.

With US regulations on drones still uncertain, some developers are looking for ways to avoid being grounded.

The Zano drone, a so-called nano-drone designed for aerial photography and selfies, weighs in at just 55 grams (two ounces) to be under the current limit of 60 grams to be regulated in the United States, said Thomas Dietrich, design director for the British-based Torquing Group.

"We've squeezed a lot of technology into a very small package," Dietrich said.

"It's a smart device. It's all gesture based and it has obstacle avoidance."

At \$279, he said, the drone "is affordable for everyone."

A full lineup of drones is on display from the French electronics group Parrot, which has expanded its offerings over the past year in both consumer and industrial unmanned vehicles.

"The past year was very good" for drone sales, said Parrot marketing director Nicolas Halftermeyer.

Parrot recently introduced its Bebop drone for the consumer segment, which can take high-definition video and be controlled from a tablet or smartphone.

It also sells a professional mapping drone called eBee and another designed for agricultural use called eBee Ag.

"This part of the business is growing very fast," he said.

The Consumer Electronics Association, which organizes the show, said the market for these devices is hitting new heights as the technology previously used for military aircraft is adapted for consumer and industrial activities.

The show includes a panel discussion on the plans for US regulations.

According to CEA research, the global market for consumer drones will approach \$130 million in revenue in 2015, up 55 percent from 2014, with unit sales of consumer [drones](#) expected to reach 400,000.

Revenue from drone sales is expected to top \$1 billion in just five years, CEA said.

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