

Hailing the future taxi: Drone-car mashup model takes flight

27 November 2018, by Mike Corder



A working scale model of Pop.Up Next, a prototype designed by Audi, Airbus and Italdesign, drives away from the air module, rear, after landing during a presentation at the Amsterdam Drone Week in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2018. The two-seater vehicle combines ground transportation with vertical take-off and landing capabilities. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

A scale model of a flying drone-car drove and hovered across an Amsterdam exhibition hall Tuesday, providing a glimpse of what could be the future of urban mobility.

The "Pop.Up Next" prototype drone, being developed by aviation giant Airbus, automaker Audi and the Italdesign design house is made up of three separate modules—a chassis with wheels, a two-seat capsule for passengers and a four-rotor drone. The concept has been shown before, but a one-quarter-size scale model made its maiden public flight at the Amsterdam Drone Week convention.

First, the drone flew across the hall and landed on a black parking spot. Then a small car drove itself underneath the drone and its passenger capsule

was lifted up to latch onto the underside of the drone. Once the two were docked, the drone lifted off again and flew back to its starting point, where the capsule was lowered onto another set of wheels to continue its journey.

The model's test flight went off without a hitch, but don't plan on hailing such an airborne ride any time soon. There are several steps to be taken before the Pop.Up Next, or a future iteration of the drone, is ready for commercial use.

"For this we need to tick a list of boxes - —the vehicle is one, safety is the overarching one, infrastructure is one, acceptability is another one," said Airbus executive Jean Brice Dumont. "I think it will take more than a decade until a real significant, massive deployment of an air taxi system" is ready.

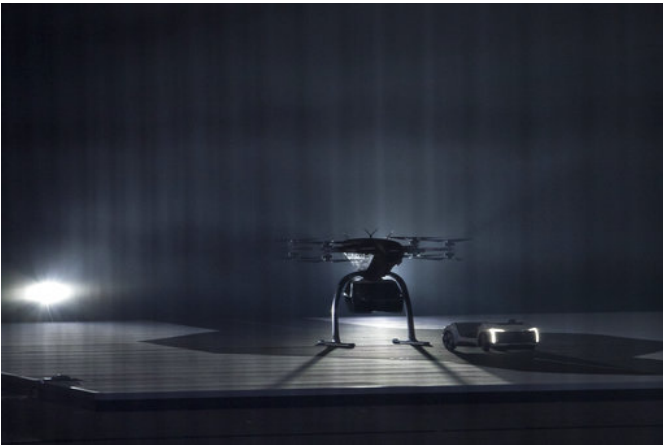


The two-seater capsule of a working scale model of Pop.Up Next, a prototype designed by Audi, Airbus and Italdesign, is transported by the air module during a demonstration at the Amsterdam Drone Week in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2018. The vehicle combines combines ground transportation with vertical take-off and landing capabilities. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

One serious competitor plans to be ready even earlier.

Uber unveiled an artist's impression a year ago of a sleek machine it hopes to start using for demonstration flights in 2020 and to have in service in 2023. Uber's battery-powered aircraft looks like a cross between a small plane and a helicopter, with fixed wings and rotors.

Meanwhile, a Dutch company has developed its own flying vehicle called the PAL-V Liberty that is a three-wheeled, two-seat car and gyroplane rolled into one.



The ground module of a working scale model of Pop.Up Next, a prototype designed by Audi, Airbus and Italdesign, drives away from the air module, center, after docking the two-seater capsule during a presentation at the Amsterdam Drone Week in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2018. The two-seater vehicle combines ground transportation with vertical take-off and landing capabilities. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

At the Amsterdam convention, European regulators also are discussing how to keep the continent's airspace safe as more and more drones take to the skies.

European Union rules are expected to come into force next year harmonizing drone regulations across the 28-nation bloc.

"As this industry is rapidly expanding, it is important

for us to anticipate market developments and be prepared for change," said Patrick Ky, executive director of the European Aviation Safety Agency.



An Airbus passenger drone and Pop.Up Next, rear, a prototype designed by Audi, Airbus and Italdesign is displayed at the Amsterdam Drone Week in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2018. The Pop.Up Next, a two-seater vehicle, combines ground transportation with vertical take-off and landing. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



Pop.Up Next, a prototype designed by Audi, Airbus and Italdesign is displayed at the Amsterdam Drone Week in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2018. The two-seater vehicle combines ground transportation with vertical take-off and landing capabilities. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

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