# Our future air taxi? Vahana self-flying machine takes off, hovers, lands

February 23 2018, by Nancy Owano

What was that hovering, helicopter-like, over the tarmac in Pendleton, Oregon? A flight test of sorts has transportation watchers wondering if we are looking at a significant new chapter in personal transportation, especially for short-distance travel in urban areas.

This January test was to see how a self-flying aircraft was shaping up,

also being described in some sites as the flying taxi. If successful, it may be a way to beat late-afternoon road traffic nightmares, pileups, closed bridges, short fuses and road rage.

"At 8:52AM on January 31, 2018 in Pendleton, Oregon," the aircraft reached a height of 5 meters (16 feet) before descending safely."

This is the Airbus Vahana project. Its team has a vision of "large-scale automated flight within urban environments."

"Airbus aims to create self-flying aircraft that can go four times faster than road traffic, with a range of 50 miles," said *Seeking Alpha* on Thursday.

Vahana's test flight took place last month. The test involved an electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft.

Reports elsewhere said this was a vertical take-off and landing that lasted for 53 seconds.

The video was just recently presented on the flying taxi mission. The Vahana team successfully flew their all-electric aircraft, which hovered above the ground briefly, but it was still a 53-second flight all on its own, without the input of a human operator, said Mariella Moon in *Engadget*. So what's the big deal?

Moon said, "it was a huge deal for the team and the company. If they succeed, Airbus could eventually use the drone for an autonomous passenger network that will give people a way to hail a flying taxi to get to where they want to go."

The aircraft has 8 propellers. As *Fast Company* described, "For most of a journey, Vahana's wings will be tilted horizontal to the ground, like a

regular airplane. But on takeoff and landing, they tilt into vertical orientation." *Fast Company* said, "The aerospace giant is developing the air taxi out of its startup-style A3 Silicon Valley skunkworks."

"We are the Silicon Valley outpost of Airbus," according to a project page. The team takes on Vahana as a project developing the first electric, self-piloted #VTOL passenger aircraft."

Specifications for the Vahana test aircraft flown on January 31, 2018 are width: 6.2 m / 20.3 ft; length: 5.7 m / 18.7 ft; height: 2.8 m / 9.2 ft; and takeoff weight: 745 kg / 1642 lb.

So what's next for this project? Zach Lovering, project executive, wrote earlier this month that "the Vahana team will continue development and perform further flight tests to transition and forward flight."

He announced their new partner for motors, California-based MAGicALL. The latter makes components such as motors, generators, inductors and transformers.

"We will begin using the MAGicALL motors soon," he said.

Now over to the user side of the equation.

How easily will people, no matter how weary of road traffic delays, warm to the this alternative way to get from point A to point B?

*TechCrunch*'s Darrell Etherington commented on the future. "Personal autonomous flight vehicles still seem pretty far out there, but company's like Airbus are investing in its potential, and leading technologists like Sebastian Thrun think they could even leapfrog autonomous cars in terms of develop pace and practical usability, so watch this space."

**More information:** vahana.aero/vahanas-first-flig … success-ade26d26ba02