

Hover-taxi whizzes over Singapore, firm eyes Asian push

October 22 2019, by Martin Abbugao



The 18-propeller vehicle took off from a promontory and flew for about two minutes and 30 seconds

A drone-like flying taxi whirled over Singapore's waterfront Tuesday, with the firm behind the test hoping the aircraft will revolutionise travel

in traffic-choked Asian cities.

The 18 propeller vehicle, developed by German firm Volocopter and with a pilot onboard during the test flight, took off from a promontory and flew for about two minutes and 30 seconds around the Marina Bay district.

Heavy rains in the morning almost delayed the flight, but the skies cleared in time for the battery-operated, two-seater taxi to quietly fly past skyscrapers.

While the hover-taxis—resembling small helicopters but powered by drone-like technology—can fly autonomously, there was a pilot aboard during the test for safety reasons.

Volocopter has already tested the aircraft in Dubai, Helsinki, Germany and Las Vegas but the Singapore trial is the first in the heart of a city.

The orderly metropolis is likely to be among the first to get the service, with a commercial rollout expected in two to four years, and Volocopter then hopes to introduce the vehicles in traffic-clogged Asian cities.

Prices for a trip in the aircraft have not yet been determined but Volocopter is aiming for just above the fare of a taxi ride.



The battery-operated, two-seater taxi flew quietly, during its first trial in the heart of a city

"We generally consider Asia to be a huge opportunity to benefit from this new technology, and we intend to have a strong presence in Asia starting here in Singapore," Volocopter chief executive Florian Reuter told AFP.

The company wants to bring the service to sprawling cities like Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok, as well as parts of India and China, he said.

Many Asian mega-cities are notorious for monster traffic jams, which leave millions of commuters facing long journeys, and can delay executives trying to dash to airports or reach important meetings on

time.

Chinese take-off

In China, Volocopter plans to partner with automaker Geely, which owns a stake in the German aviation company, to mass-produce flying taxis for the Chinese market, Reuter said.

The flying taxi will be used in Singapore to provide quick travel on routes such as from Marina Bay to Sentosa island, home to several tourist attractions and luxury hotels, or to ferry people from ships anchored offshore to port.

Earlier this week in the city-state, Volocopter unveiled the "VoloPort", a flying taxi port at the water's edge with a landing and takeoff pad as well as a passenger terminal.

Hover-taxi

German-made two-seater tested in Singapore

Volocopter

18 rotors



Engine type
Brushless DC
electric motor

*Already tested in: Germany, Dubai,
Helsinki and Las Vegas*

11.3 m

Single rotor
diameter:
2.3 m

Rotor rim
diameter:
9.3 m

Power source
Exchangeable and
rechargeable lithium-ion
battery packs that can be
replaced in 5 minutes

■ **Range**
35 km

■ **Max. payload**
200 kg

■ **Max. airspeed**
110 kph

■ **Capacity**
2 passengers,
plus hand luggage

■ **Commercial rollout**
Expected in two to
four years

Source: Volocopter

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Graphic showing a driverless hover-taxi tested in Singapore on Tuesday

The port was not used for Tuesday's test flight because it has not been certified yet.

Volocopter faces some competition, including from Uber and Kitty Hawk, a firm backed by Google co-founder Larry Page.

"We feel we are at the humble beginnings of a new mode of transportation that ultimately will transform the way we see mobility in cities," Reuter said.

"This might sound sci-fi futuristic to many people, but I think we are now starting to grasp what implications this technology can actually have."

Singapore has become a centre for testing self-driving vehicles, and earlier this year conducted a public trial of autonomous buses booked through an app.

The city-state is currently hosting a major transport technology conference.

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