

Flying taxis braced for takeoff at Dubai Airshow

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Archer Aviation displayed its Midnight electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) flying taxi is at the Dubai Airshow this week.

Flying taxis have been a sci-fi fixture for decades, but one operator says they are finally close to reality, first in the United States and then the

United Arab Emirates and India.

"What we used to think of as [science fiction](#) is now science fact," Billy Nolen, Archer Aviation's chief safety officer, told AFP at the Dubai Airshow on Wednesday.

"This is happening, it is real, and you will see this in the market in 2025."

Reports of futuristic aircraft ferrying passengers over cities—and their car-choked roads—have been cropping up for years, evoking images of 1960s cartoon "The Jetsons".

Yet regulatory approval from the US Federal Aviation Administration for Archer's Midnight, a four-passenger, electric-powered vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, is expected as soon as 2025.

That will trigger "almost concurrent" certification in the UAE, said Nikhil Goel, chief commercial officer at Archer, whose major backers include Mubadala, an Emirati [sovereign wealth fund](#).

UAE flights are expected to start in 2026 on two initial routes: from Dubai airport to the upmarket Palm development, and Abu Dhabi airport to the city-center Corniche.

"We expect the demand to be more than we can even handle. The pricing will be relatively premium at the outset," said Goel.

"But then over time, we'll deploy hundreds of aircraft in the UAE (which) will also lower the price considerably."

At the same time, flights will launch in New Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore, Goel said, calling India "a really, really big market for us".



The cockpit of Archer Aviation's Midnight aircraft.

'Fully zero emissions'

Test flights for Archer's Midnight are currently taking place in California, and rival firm Joby has performed its first experimental journeys in New York.

The Midnight has a dozen propellers—independently wired and powered, to minimize the risk of a "catastrophic" failure—and a wing, allowing it to glide in the event that it can no longer stay aloft.

It will be able to fully recharge in the six or seven minutes that it takes to switch passengers between trips, and has a current maximum range of about 160 kilometers (100 miles) at about 240 kilometers per hour (150 mph).

Flying the aircraft is straightforward, said Goel, who insisted that a 12-year-old in a simulator could learn it in 20 minutes.

Flights will be booked as ride shares, and will initially cost about \$4-5 per passenger mile before dropping to half that in about two or three years, Goel added.

With flying taxis plying existing helicopter routes—and theoretically safer, cheaper and more environmentally friendly than helicopters—there is significant room to scale up, the company says.

"We have designed this [business case](#) to operate in [urban environments](#), say from the airport to city center," said Golen, the chief safety officer.

"It's fully zero-emissions, fully sustainable, it is eco-friendly, it has about 100 times less noise signature than a conventional helicopter.

"So it's very neighbor-friendly as well."

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