

Merlin Labs develops autonomous 55-craft King Air fleet

27 May 2021, by Sarah Katz



Merlin Labs UAV exterior. Credit: Merlin Labs

Inspired by a close encounter with a fellow aircraft during his years as a novice pilot, Merlin Labs founder Matt George found himself drawn to the idea of applying ground transportation safety methods to air traffic. Now, two-and-a-half years later, his company has announced a collaborative effort with Dynamic Aviation to develop a 55-aircraft fleet capable of autonomous flight.

Already, this initiative has raised \$3.5 million in seed funding and \$21.5 million in Series A, headed by First Round Capital and former Google Ventures, GV. So far, Merlin Labs reports performing a couple hundred test flight missions using the three generations of its first experiment system. Merlin Labs explains that while a human pilot monitors the aircraft from the ground in case of emergency, the aircraft are otherwise equipped of autonomous flight from takeoff to touchdown.

All of that said, before these 55 King Air planes can fly for commercial purposes, Merlin Labs must still obtain a supplemental type certification from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). At this time, Matt George has not yet stated a timeline

for when his team expects to have this certification.

In the meantime, however, Merlin Labs is preparing a method using [natural language](#) processing through which [air traffic](#) controllers can directly communicate with the aircraft. George states confidence in a high degree of cognition, once the aircraft translate human commands into action. Indeed, Merlin Labs aim for this conversation to be a two-way street, wherein the [aircraft](#) performs actions based on human instructions from the ground and then confirms those actions with a reply of acknowledgement.

Despite all of these innovations, George confirms that Merlin Labs' goal remains not to replace actual airplanes that carry people, but instead to assist delivery companies such as FedEx and UPS as well as their partner in all of this, Dynamic Aviation.



Merlin Labs UAV interior. Credit: Merlin Labs

More information: www.merlinlabs.com/

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