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Aurora Demonstrates Autonomous Landings on General Aviation Aircraft

Manassas, VA, June 29, 2009 – Aurora Flight Sciences announced today that it has successfully demonstrated fully autonomous takeoffs and landings (ATOL) on a General Aviation aircraft.

The tests have been underway since March using a company-owned Cessna 337 configured as an “optionally piloted” aircraft testbed. The aircraft is known as “Chiron”.

The flights have been conducted under the FAA Experimental category and took place near Aurora’s headquarters in Manassas, Virginia. A safety pilot and a test engineer were onboard the aircraft at all times. The Chiron test configuration allows for seamless transition between piloted and autonomous flight, allowing the testing of multiple configurations per sortie while ensuring safe operations. The pilot retains the ability to take control or transition back to manual control at any time.

“The successful Chiron ATOL testing marks a major step forward for Aurora’s unmanned technology,” said Rob Searle, the chief engineer for the program. “While Aurora has routinely operated vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) unmanned aircraft in a fully autonomous mode, this marks the first time we have performed fully autonomous takeoffs and landings in a conventional takeoff and landing (CTOL) configuration.”

Most current UAVs, such as the Predator, have a pilot “in the loop” for takeoff and landing. Department of Defense studies have identified this approach as a major source of UAV accidents and losses.

The technology will be incorporated in several upcoming Aurora programs, most notably a high-altitude, long-endurance technology demonstrator known as Orion.

About Aurora Flight Sciences

Aurora Flight Sciences designs and builds robotic aircraft and other advanced aerospace vehicles for scientific and military applications. Aurora is headquartered in Manassas, VA and operates production plants in Bridgeport, WV and Columbus, MS and a Research and Development Center in Cambridge, MA. To view recent press releases and more about Aurora please visit our web site at www.aurora.aero.

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