

Sky taxi nears debut



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People here in New York have no shortage of ways of getting around. We can hail a taxi, hop on a bus, or ride one of the world's largest subway systems. Now a new option is set to make its debut up above. NHK World's David McClure explains.

The 10 days at this major US air show have witnessed something historic. They were wowed as Wisk Arrow, the air taxi successfully completed the first public demo flight of an autonomous fully electric aircraft in the US. The air taxi utilizes batteries and electric motors, so there are no carbon emissions. Its ability to take off and land vertically means it can operate even where space is tight. The aircraft can reportedly reach speeds of about 220 kilometers per hour. The company says it could take just 7 minutes to fly a distance that currently takes an hour by car.

I think it's a really cool concept. Love to see the new innovative features and things there are, so yeah, great to see.

Executives at the start up have also started laying the groundwork for overseas expansion. In May they partnered with Japan's leading aviation company, Japan Airlines. They're aiming to launch services that include pilotless autonomous flight.

Japan has some of the best technology and aerospace expertise industry in the whole world, so it's just an incredible opportunity for us to be able to work with folks in Japan and one day to ideally be able to provide this type of service in Japan.

Another Japanese company has also set its sights on the sky. Automotive giant Toyota is helping to facilitate the development and mass production of electric air taxis. It's been investing in Joby, a California based aerospace startup, since 2020. Toyota staff are on site to share manufacturing expertise and help the company develop efficient mass production lines.

We have laid out everything here in cooperation with Toyota. They're experienced with the racing automotive composite manufacturing. We came here and developed that with them.

Toyota helped develop this plasma tool to quickly prepare the surface of carbon composite propeller blades.

This process basically takes what would take a half hour to do normally with a person in 1 minute, so it cuts it 30 times. You can imagine how this is going to allow us to build not just 10s, but 100s and 1000s of airplanes as we expand and ramp up our production rate.

Joby will get a chance to demonstrate its air taxi along with other companies at the World Expo in Osaka in 2025.

Once you actually have a surface like this and people start to be like "Oh, I can go here." We're also looking at ways to deploy air taxis into the different key markets in Japan.

Just last month Joby successfully completed an exhibition flight here in New York as local leaders announced plans to redevelop a downtown heliport into an electrified sustainable transportation hub. With companies like Joby and Wisk aiming to start commercial operations as early as 2025, fast zero emission air taxis could open a new frontier in urban mobility.

Source: (NHK World News)

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. Would you feel comfortable using an air taxi? Why or why not?
2. When would it be convenient to use an air taxi?
3. Can you think of any trouble air taxis might have?
4. What other companies do you think should invest in air taxis?
5. Can you think of ways to use sky taxis other than just as "taxis?"