



FIRST AIR CARGO NETWORK FLOWN BY A NON-HUMAN PILOT - MERLIN SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETES TEST FLIGHTS

News / Manufacturer



Merlin successfully completed 25 test flights in Alaska following a \$1 million contract with FAA to demonstrate a highly-automated flight control system in conjunction with a safety pilot. In partnership with the FAA-designated University of Alaska Fairbanks UAS Test Site and Everts Air Cargo, the test flights reached rural areas using crewed aircraft augmented with its integrated hardware and software solution, the Merlin Pilot.

All routes originated from Fairbanks and flew to Fort Yukon, Galena, Huslia, Tanana and Prudhoe Bay. Over sixty hours of systems-on, autonomous flight time were successfully completed with the Merlin Pilot allowing for extensive data collection in a real world environment with complex terrain and inclement weather. This data is essential to maturing Merlin's in-flight capabilities as well as progressing autonomy for the aviation industry, making skies safer and more accessible for the future. These test flights also make Merlin the first autonomy system to be integrated into the NAS.

Dr. Cathy Cahill, Director of the Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft System Integration at the UAF

Geophysical Institute, commented: “Operating in Alaska is a real challenge. I like to say we’re the final exam. If you can fly here you can fly anywhere as we deal with long distances, extreme climate variations, and limited communications coverage. As we’ve learned in collaboration with Merlin’s team, it’s very apparent that they are doing this right. Their integrated approach to our unique ecosystem is one of the main reasons they were the first company with which we approached the FAA. They use real data to train the onboard automation system to ensure safety.”

Matthew George, co-founder and CEO of Merlin, stated: “The data we’ve been able to gather from these flight trials is critical to the maturation of our in-flight technology, but also to our continued progression in certifying the Merlin Pilot. It’s exciting to know our technology can successfully reach remote locations in Alaska, proving an important application for autonomy; its ability to assist in dangerous missions. We’re incredibly thankful for the support and partnership of the FAA, Everts Air Cargo, and ACUASI. Our partners have been critical in our ability to progress the Merlin Pilot.”

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