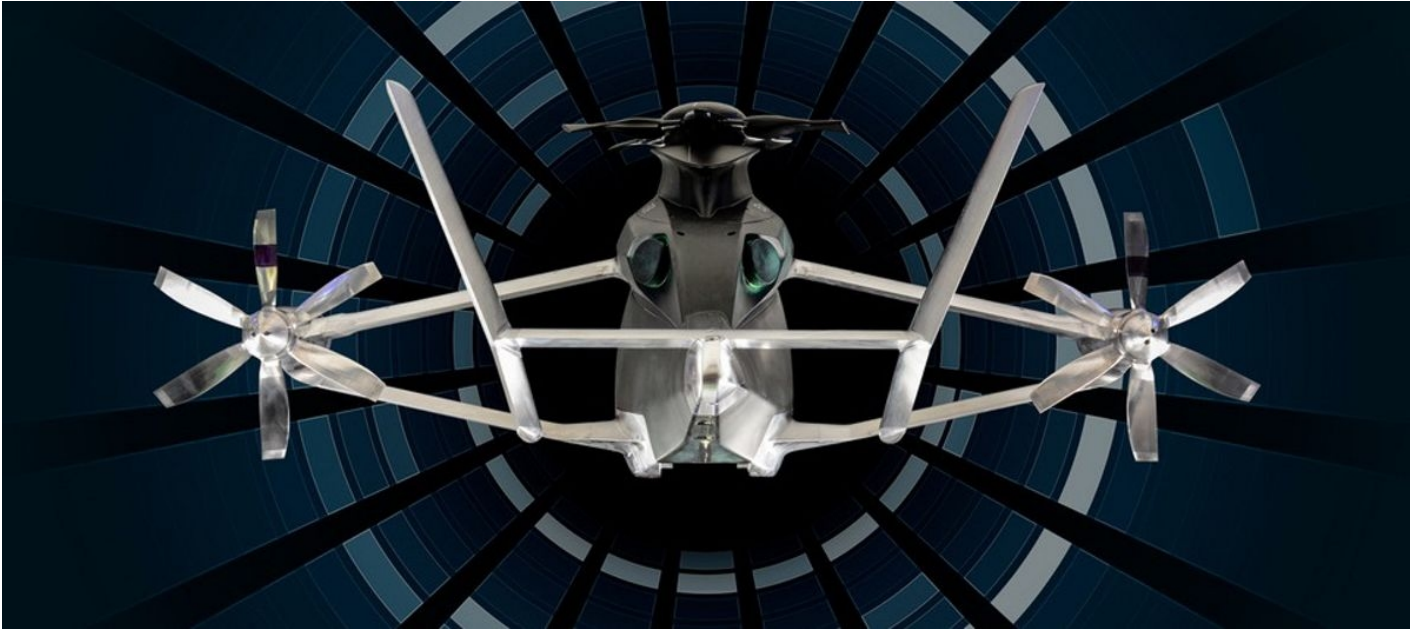




ONE STEP AHEAD AT ALL TIMES: HELICOPTER INNOVATION AT AIRBUS

News / Manufacturer



At Airbus, innovation is more than just an engineer's dream; it is a *modus operandi*. No matter the programme, function, product, working method or even cooperation model, there is always room for improvement. And that is a good thing. While innovation is a state of mind, it is also a key driver in the helicopter industry, which must constantly strive to reinvent itself in order to satisfy its customers. Airbus is committed to setting new standards in the helicopter industry, both by improving the existing range and thereby offering safer, greener and more efficient helicopters, and by coming up with groundbreaking ideas in response to the future challenges of the 21st century.



The VSR700 is a military drone developed in conjunction with Hélicoptères Guimbal.

Article: Alexandre Marchand

Article adapted from Rotor magazine

“If we are to survive in the helicopter market of the next few decades, we must start anticipating our customers’ future needs, even if it means taking risks.” Jean-Brice Dumont, Airbus Helicopters Head of Engineering, explains how the company goes about the task of staying one step ahead.

Today’s helicopter industry is beset by uncertainty. What role can innovation play in aiding its development?

Jean-Brice Dumont : Though these are anxious times for the company – in the face of increased competition – we stick firmly to our policy of investing in innovation and R&D. Our road map is still the same: to operate in the present while also continuing to prepare for the medium- and long-term future. Our goal at this moment in time is to improve our existing helicopters, which we depend on to make our living, while also remaining true to our core values, the first of which is safety, followed by customer satisfaction, quality and the competitiveness of our products. Innovation remains a key driver in the life of our range. At the same time, however, we must prepare for the long term. And that requires courage and clear vision on our part because our environment is growing increasingly complex by the day. Technologies are evolving at a tremendous rate, as is the helicopter market. Failure to anticipate those developments means failure to survive, which is why we invest so much effort in R&D in response to the market downturn.

What is your priority when it comes to innovation?

J-B. D.: Safety first and foremost! But innovation is not effective if it is unable to satisfy customers by offering them genuine added value. Take a look at the H160. Some technologies are easy to spot, such as the new rotor, the new design for the doors and emergency exits and the very high level of sound and vibration control. But there are others that are not so visible, such as the roll-out

of an innovative industrial process that allows us to cut cycles, reduce costs and to facilitate mass customisation. Our range of services has also been extensively modernised, a process that has drawn in particular on new digital technologies. Innovation is at the heart of everything we do, including the ways in which we work. It is part of our DNA.



The industrial process to build the H160 is also very innovative and allows Airbus Helicopters to reduce cycles and costs.

Is being innovative enough? Do you have to be visionary too?

J-B. D.: You do have to be visionary and stay on your toes. Let's take urban mobility as an example. This is an area that Airbus is monitoring closely. The CityAirbus flying taxi demonstrator that we are working on is an original solution for the future, one with the potential to revolutionise the way in which the inhabitants of major conurbations get around. Their dream is to escape the hazards posed by gridlocked streets. We are playing an active part in studies into this topic, working on the transporter, powerplant, operations and the business model. In terms of drones, we are looking at every possible avenue. We are, for example, working with the Singaporean authorities on an experimental project called Skyways, which seeks to develop an unmanned aircraft system for delivering packages in urban environments. We have also reached a very advanced stage with the VSR700, a military drone developed in conjunction with Hélicoptères Guimbal. Another concept we firmly believe in is the speed capability of the Clean Sky 2 demonstrator, the successor to the X3, known as Racer. The technical solution we have put forward is very appealing because it is simple and inexpensive. It is an illustration of perfect innovation, which is innovation based on reality.

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