

Lilium's electric jet taxi completes its first flight

Why it matters: Lilium's express goal is to create a flying transportation network, and their means of getting there is just as strange as science fiction predicted it would be. Here's the Lilium Jet: a vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) five-seater craft powered by 36 electric jet engines that are just as efficient as an electric car over long distances. While it sounds (and looks) far-fetched, it completed its maiden flight a fortnight ago.

Lilium's a young Munich-based startup that's [funded](#) by Twitter co-founder Ev Williams, Tencent, Skype co-founder Niklas Zennstrom, and a couple of venture funds. They see themselves as a Tesla meets Uber meets Boeing, as the pioneers of short-range versatile aircraft. Their plan is to release a fleet of Lilium Jets as a taxi-like service in 2025 completing short flights like New York to Boston in about an hour. Allegedly, prices will even be "competitive with today's travel options."

The plan requires the [Lilium Jet](#) to be maneuverable, affordable and scalable. Meeting those criteria requires a new type of aircraft that is smaller and more environmentally friendly than existing options. Unlike many other startup vehicles with outlandish designs, the Lilium Jet's is rooted in logic: dual wings to provide stability during vertical flight, electric engines because they can reach max thrust in less than a second, engines on adjustable panels to smoothly transition to horizontal flight, fixed wing design for efficiency...

The result of all that careful thought is a vehicle almost like a speeder from Star Wars. A quick launch and fast journey are made possible with a 300 km/h (186 mph) max speed and enough battery for an hour's flight, Lilium claims. While cruising it's as efficient as modern-day electric cars, using just 10% of its 2000 hp to maintain speed. The wingspan is 11 m, and it can hold four passengers and a pilot.

The maiden flight for the Lilium Jet was [completed](#) on May 4th (a nod, perhaps, to its sci-fi nature), where it, well, went up a few meters then came back down. While that's unexciting, Lilium promises that the Jet is already capable of complex flight patterns, and considering they demonstrated some [cool maneuvers](#) with a two-seater prototype two years ago, there's no doubt we'll see the Jet back in action soon. Hopefully, we'll be given some proof of Lilium's astonishing claims.