

A German startup just completed its first test of a new on-demand air taxi

The vertical takeoff and landing vehicle could be used for ride-sharing, the company says.

By **Peter Holley**

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For several years now, a handful of daring companies have been jockeying for a futuristic form of bragging rights: To be the first company to deliver an on-demand air taxi service that begins to change the way people move around crowded, car-dependent cities.

Although they are technically known as “vertical take-off and landing vehicles,” many people have labeled these new machines something far simpler: “flying cars.”

This week, Lilium, a Munich-based startup founded in 2015, unveiled their latest entry in the flying car race, an electric, five-seat air-taxi prototype that completed its first flight earlier this month, according to the company. Powered by 36 jet engines, but lacking a tail, rudder and propellers, the aircraft is designed to take-off and land vertically.

With a range of about 185 miles in 60 minutes on a single charge, the company claims their prototype’s energy usage is comparable to an electric car traveling the same distance.

In a statement posted online, Daniel Wiegand, Lilium’s co-founder and CEO, called the aircraft a significant step towards “urban air mobility” and noted that having five seats could open it up to ride-sharing or business travelers arriving in a city, presumably from a nearby airport.

“In less than two years we have been able to design, build and successfully fly an aircraft that will serve as our template for mass production,” the statement added. “Moving from two to five seats was always our ambition as it enables us to open up the skies to many more travelers.”

How would it work?

Lilium said the aircraft will be accessible via an app that allows customers to locate the nearest “landing pad” among a network across “cities and regions.” Though the company hasn’t revealed which cities and regions it plans to launch in, Lilium claims the trips will be comparable in price to a conventional taxi cab, but four times as fast.

The company did not release specific pricing information.

“Lilium expects to be fully-operational in various cities around the world by 2025, although trial services will start earlier than this in several locations,” the company said.

Increasingly, flying cars and other personal craft are no longer just the stuff of imagination. Companies such as Uber, Airbus, Rolls-Royce Holdings (the aircraft engine manufacturer, not the luxury car brand owned by Germany’s BMW) and Volocopter already are developing them.

Uber plans to create a network of flying taxis in Dubai and the Dallas area by the year 2020. Kitty Hawk — a flying car startup created by Google co-founder Larry Page — is already offering test flights to potential customers.

Eventually, flying-car inventors say, commuters will be able to order an air taxi that whisks them across town in minutes, bypassing traffic-clogged streets below.

In Dubai, police [unveiled a flying motorbike known as the Scorpion in 2017](#) that places a daring pilot between four whirling propellers.

In Texas, the chief executive of [Lift Aircraft](#) says his start-up’s electric-powered vertical-takeoff-and-landing aircraft, the Hexa, plans to begin offering 15-minute flights across a lake outside Austin this year for \$249 a pop.

Unlike with conventional aircraft, the Federal Aviation Administration does not require a pilot’s license to operate a “powered ultralight” craft. The agency’s rules require instead that ultralights operate during daylight hours in open areas and limit their use to [sport and recreation](#).

The Lilium Jet five seater all-electric air taxi