



# MIT Kestrel: A SuperSTOL Solution to the Personal Electric Aircraft Market

May 16, 2019

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in partnership with



# Urban Air Mobility: Demand for personal electric aviation is driving a boom in vehicle development



# To be competitive in the Urban Air Mobility Market:

Specification	Minimum Requirement
Payload	4 pax + baggage
Range	100 nmi with reserves
Speed	120 kts cruise minimum
Runway	<b>300 ft maximum, push for 100 ft</b>
Takeoff	<b>400 ft over 50 ft obstacle</b>
Crosswind capability	20 kts
Weather	IFR capable



Vertiport Concept: Uber Elevate White Paper

Instead of VTOL: what about STOL?



# STOL for UAM applications is worth exploring

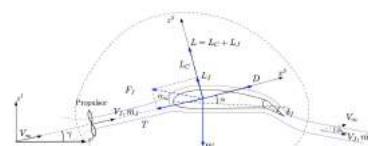
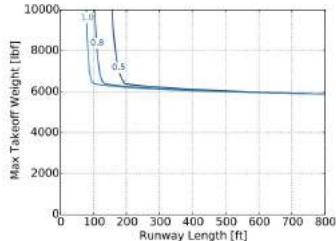
- Fixed wing has significant range and payload performance benefits over VTOL
- Certification path for fixed wing aircraft exists:
  - < 60kts stall speed
- Hybrid-electric allows battering sizing for takeoff and landing operations



NASA X-57 Maxwell



**Fall 2017 16.886: Initial Feasibility Study**



**Spring 2018 16.82: Full Scale Conceptual Design**

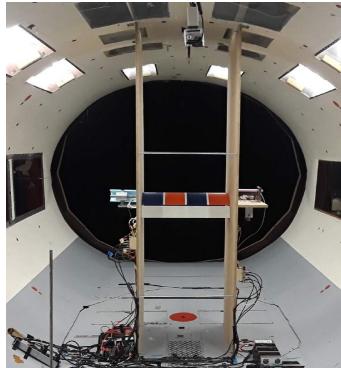
Requirements



Full Scale Design

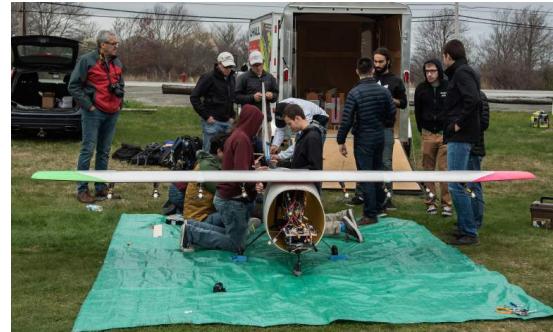
Design Updates

**Fall 2018 16.82: 30% Design & Wind Tunnel Test**



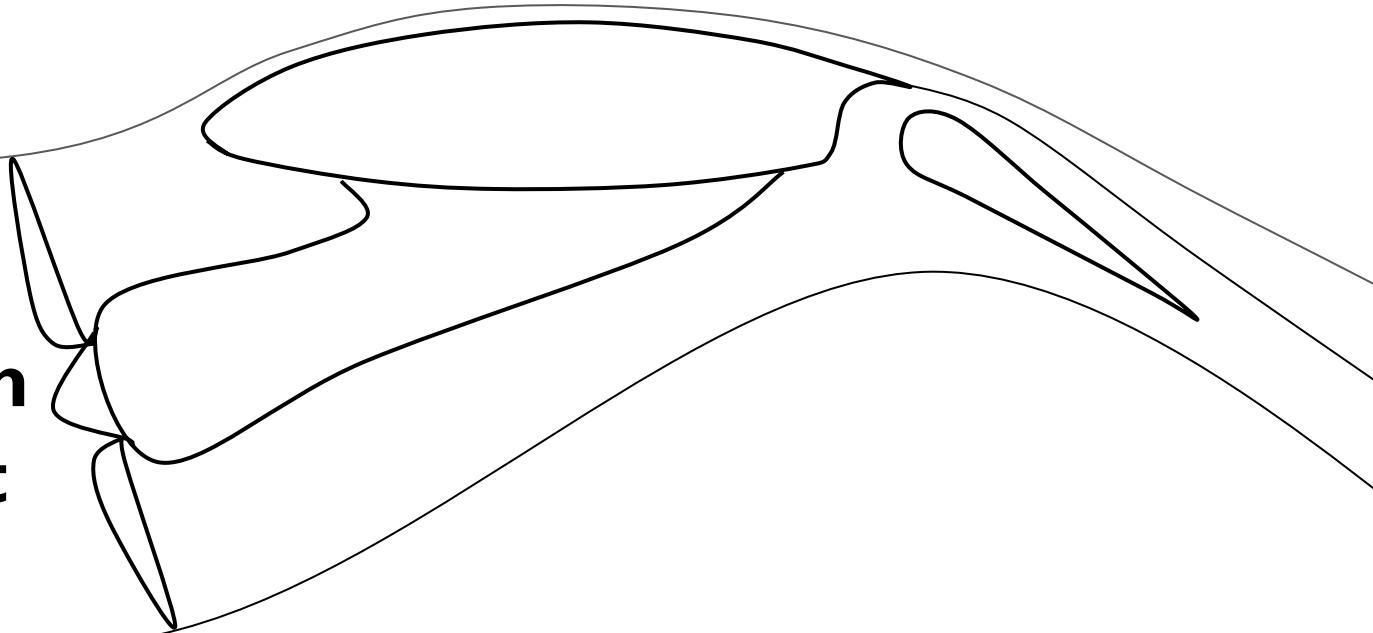
**Spring 2019 16.82I: 30% Scale Build & Flight Test**

30% Design



MIT AeroAstro

# Introduction to blown lift



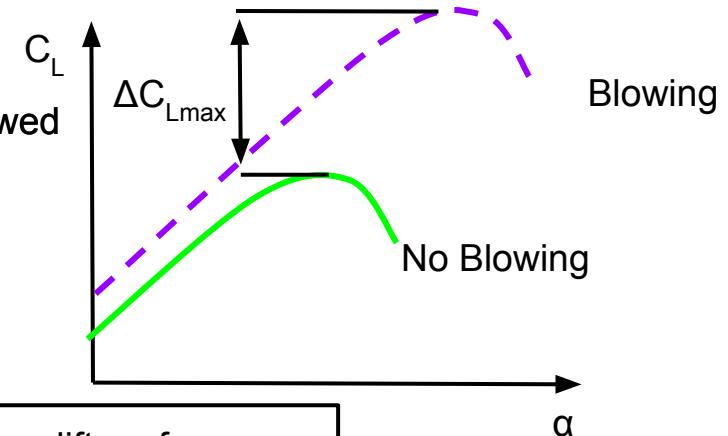
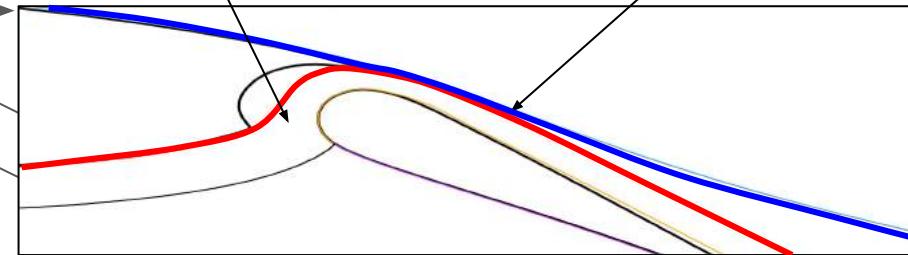
# Blown Lift Mechanism

Blowing increases  $C_{L_{max}}$  by:

- Delaying stall
  - Higher angles of attack ( $\alpha$ ) and flap deflections ( $\delta_f$ ) allowed
- Deflecting blowing jet downwards
  - Jet increases downward momentum flux  
→ Increased wing lift

Blowing introduces high jet velocity (red) through the flap gap

Main element wake (blue) is energized



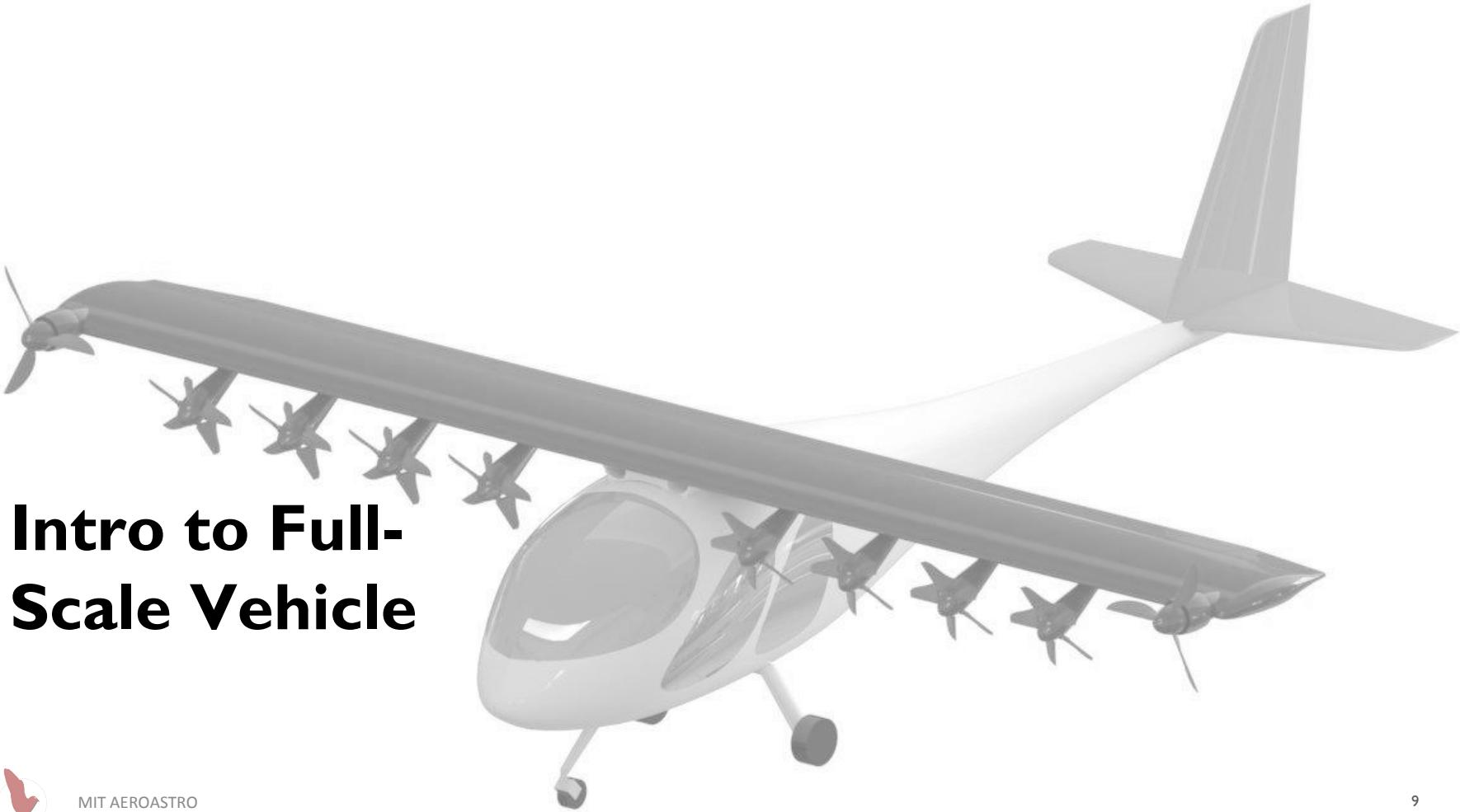
JVL and XFOIL were used to model blown lift performance



# Benefits of Blown Lift

- Takeoff and landing within rooftop dimensions due to high  $C_L$  and  $C_D$
- Safety benefits of fixed-wing glide capability
- Newly-available option due to advances in electric power systems and aerodynamic simulations





# Intro to Full-Scale Vehicle



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# Full-Scale Concept (Spring 2018)

## Capability

- Carries 4 passengers
- 100 mi range
- Operate on ~80 ft runway
- 2700 lb MTOW

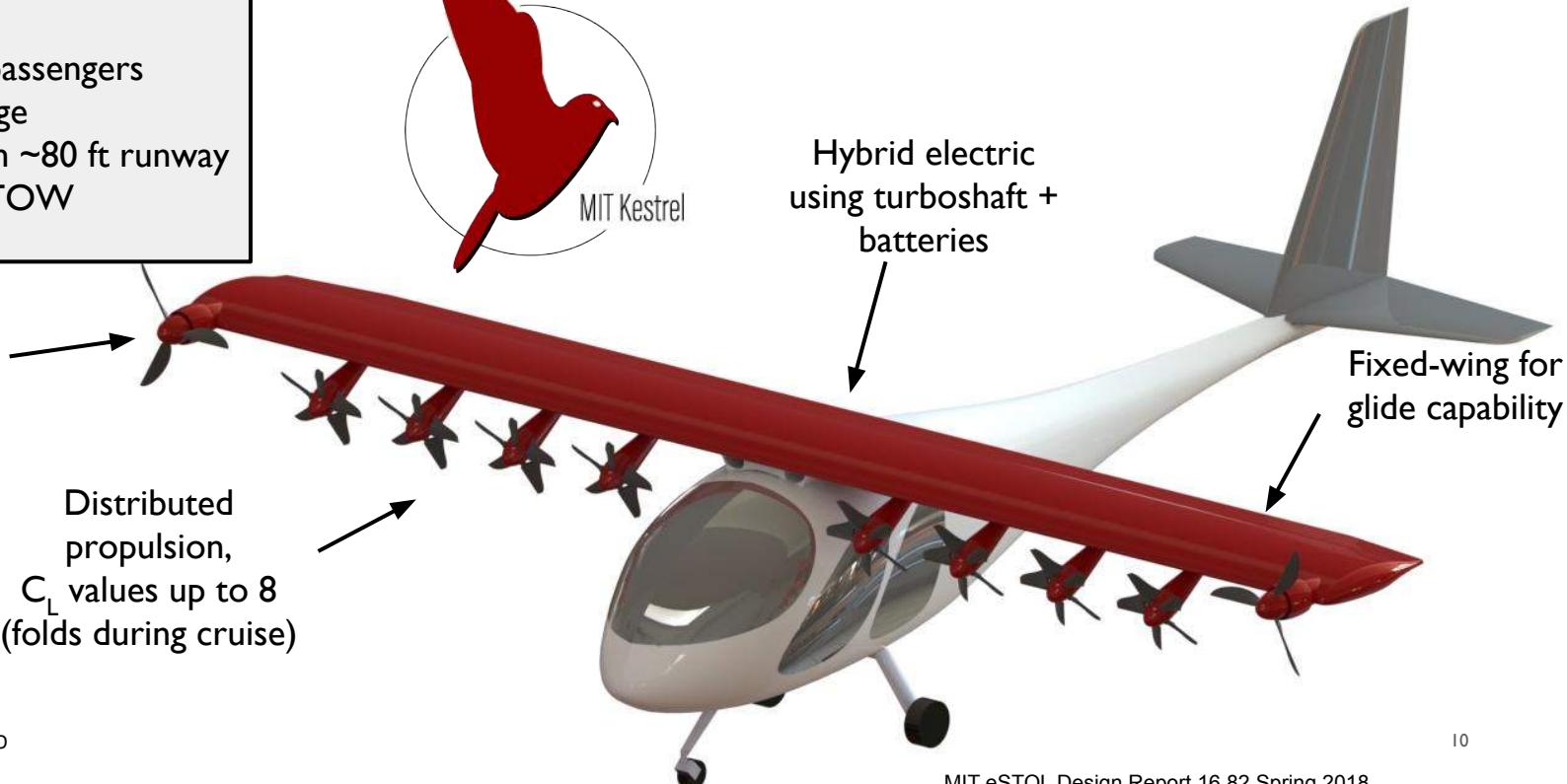


2 larger outer  
motors optimized  
for cruise

Distributed  
propulsion,  
 $C_L$  values up to 8  
(folds during cruise)

Hybrid electric  
using turboshaft +  
batteries

Fixed-wing for  
glide capability



# Technical Risks

- Blown lift does not match prediction
  - JVL/theoretical models do not translate to real flight
- JVL tail sizing insufficient
  - Stability predictions find that flaps and blowing cancel, requiring a smaller tail than would be expected with either alone
- Control difficulty close to stall due to rapid pitching moment change
  - Pitching moment changes drastically when flow stalls
- Insufficient low-speed, lateral control
  - Controllability
- Difficulty controlling approach glide slope
  - Too many piloting inputs may make the landing difficult
- Insufficient precision landing capability
  - Aircraft must not only land in a short distance, but on a short runway



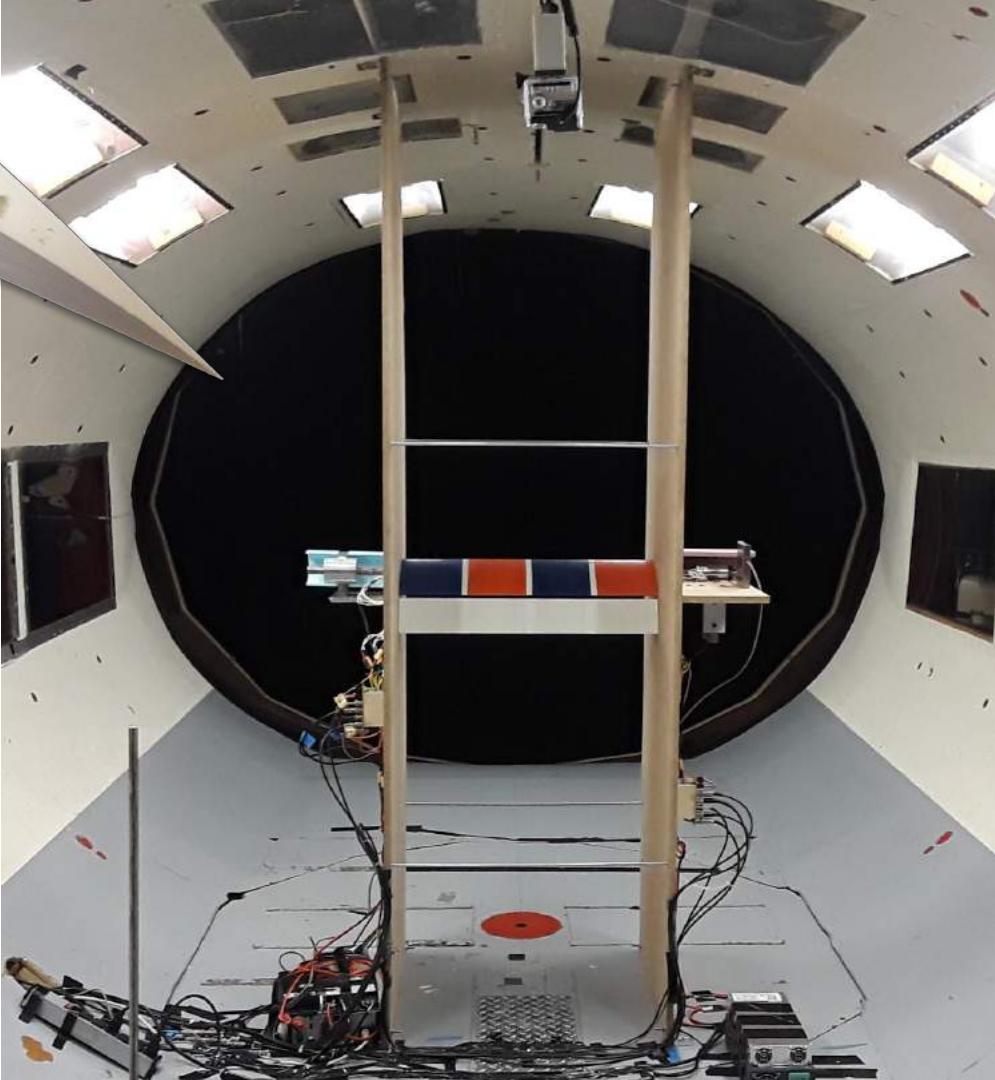
# Technical Risk Mitigation Strategies for Full-Scale Concept

- Wind Tunnel Testing
  - Validate JVL model
  - Tail sizing and pitching moments
- Subscale Vehicle Flight Tests
  - Tail sizing and pitching moments
  - Lateral control at low speeds
  - Approach glide slope
  - Precision landing capabilities



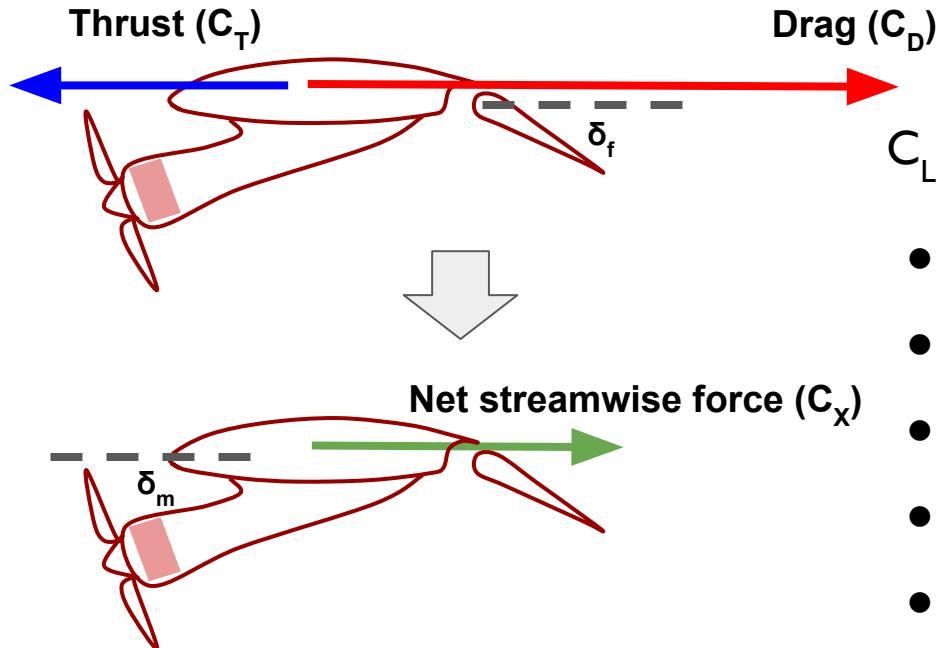


# Wind Tunnel Testing



MIT AeroAstro

# Blown Wing Test Parameters



$C_L, C_X, C_M$  depend on:

- $\Delta c_J$ : Jet momentum coefficient (blowing)
- $\delta_f$ : Flap deflection
- $\delta_m$ : Motor deflection
- $\alpha$ : Angle of attack
- Placement of blowing motors (fixed)

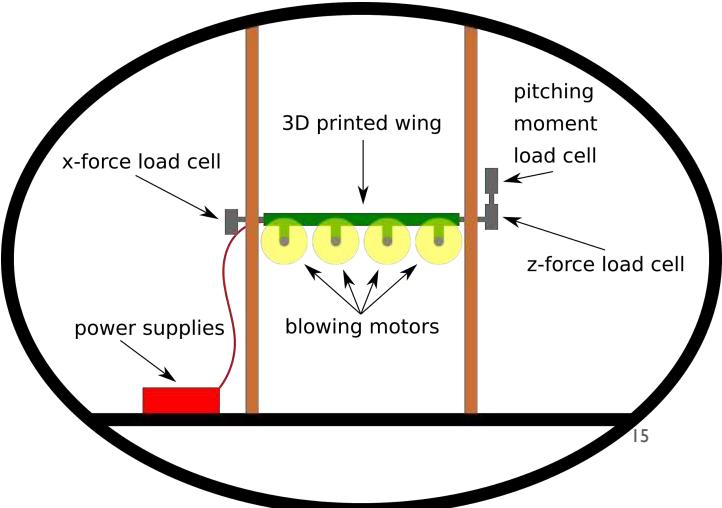
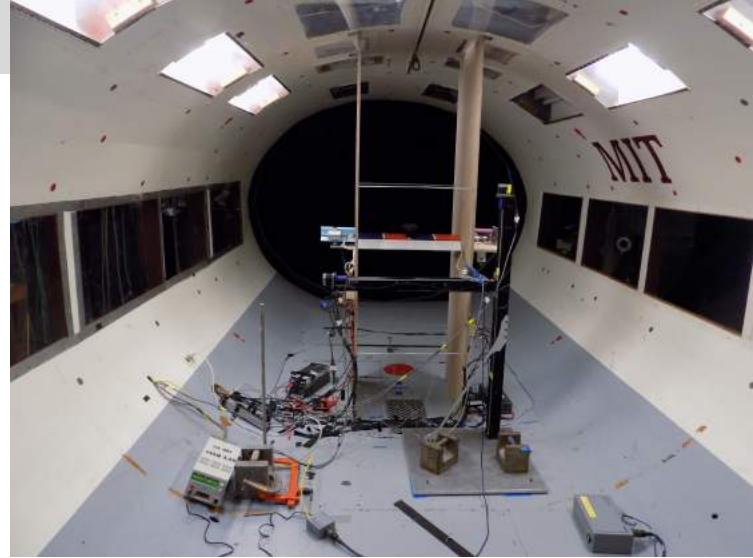


# Wind Tunnel Model

- 4 spanwise sections held together by pins
- $\delta_f$  fixed for any set of flap supports
- $\delta_m$  fixed for any set of motor mounts
- Tested in WBWT, which has a 7'x10' elliptical cross-section
- Plywood shielding used to approximate 2D flow over the 2' wing span.



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# Wind Tunnel Test Plan

## Test Matrix

- $\delta_m$ :  $10^\circ, 20^\circ$
- $\alpha$  :  $-5^\circ \rightarrow 25^\circ$
- $\delta_f$  :  $0^\circ, 10^\circ, 20^\circ, 30^\circ, 45^\circ, 55^\circ, 60^\circ, 90^\circ$
- $\Delta c_j$  :  $0 \rightarrow 6$



## Design Choices

- Motor mount angle  $\delta_m$
- Spanwise motor mount spacing
- Horizontal tail sizing



## Flight Testing and Planning

- $\delta_f, \alpha$  settings for takeoff and landing
- Stall and control characteristics



# Wind Tunnel Results

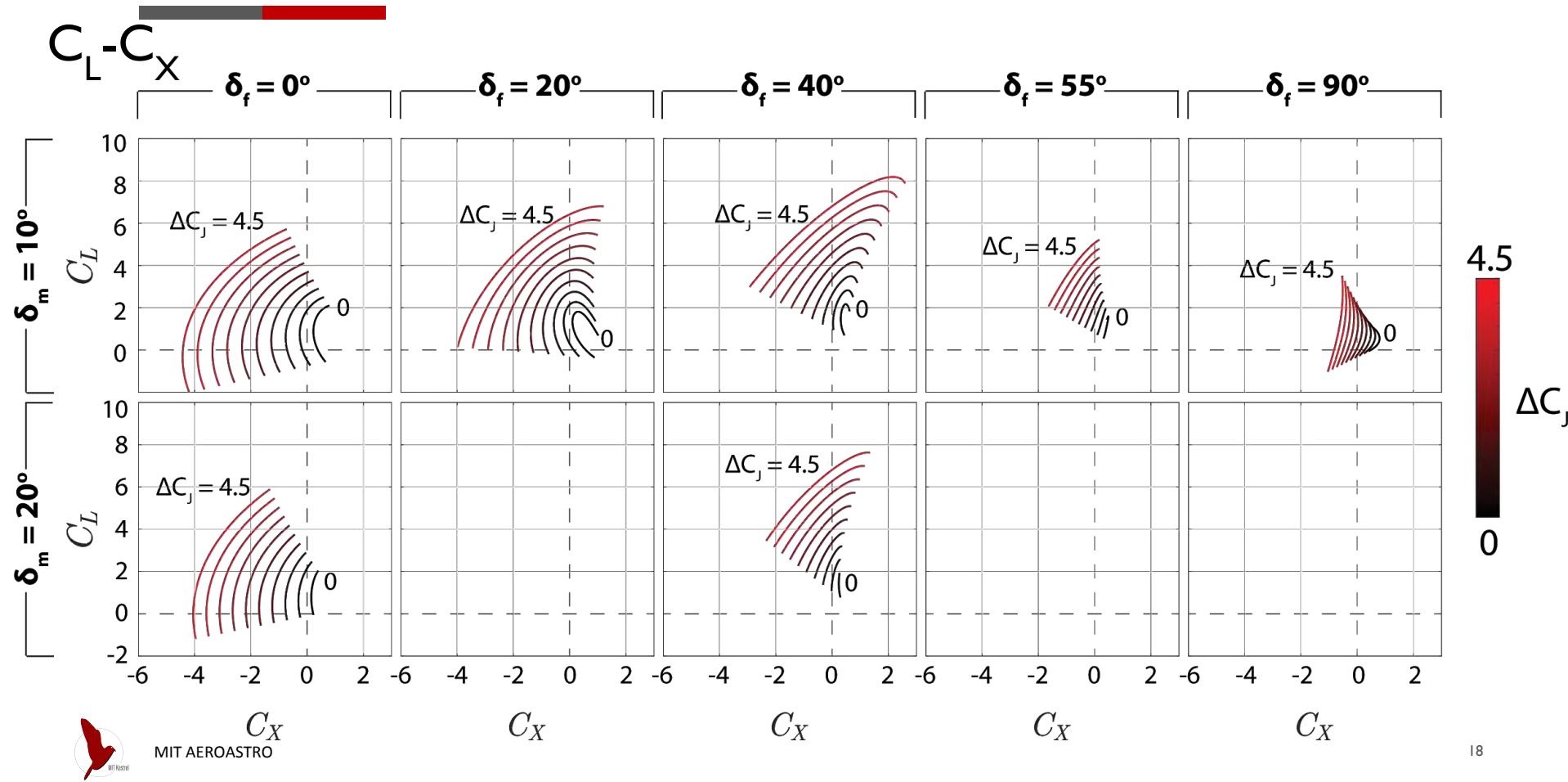
## Conclusions

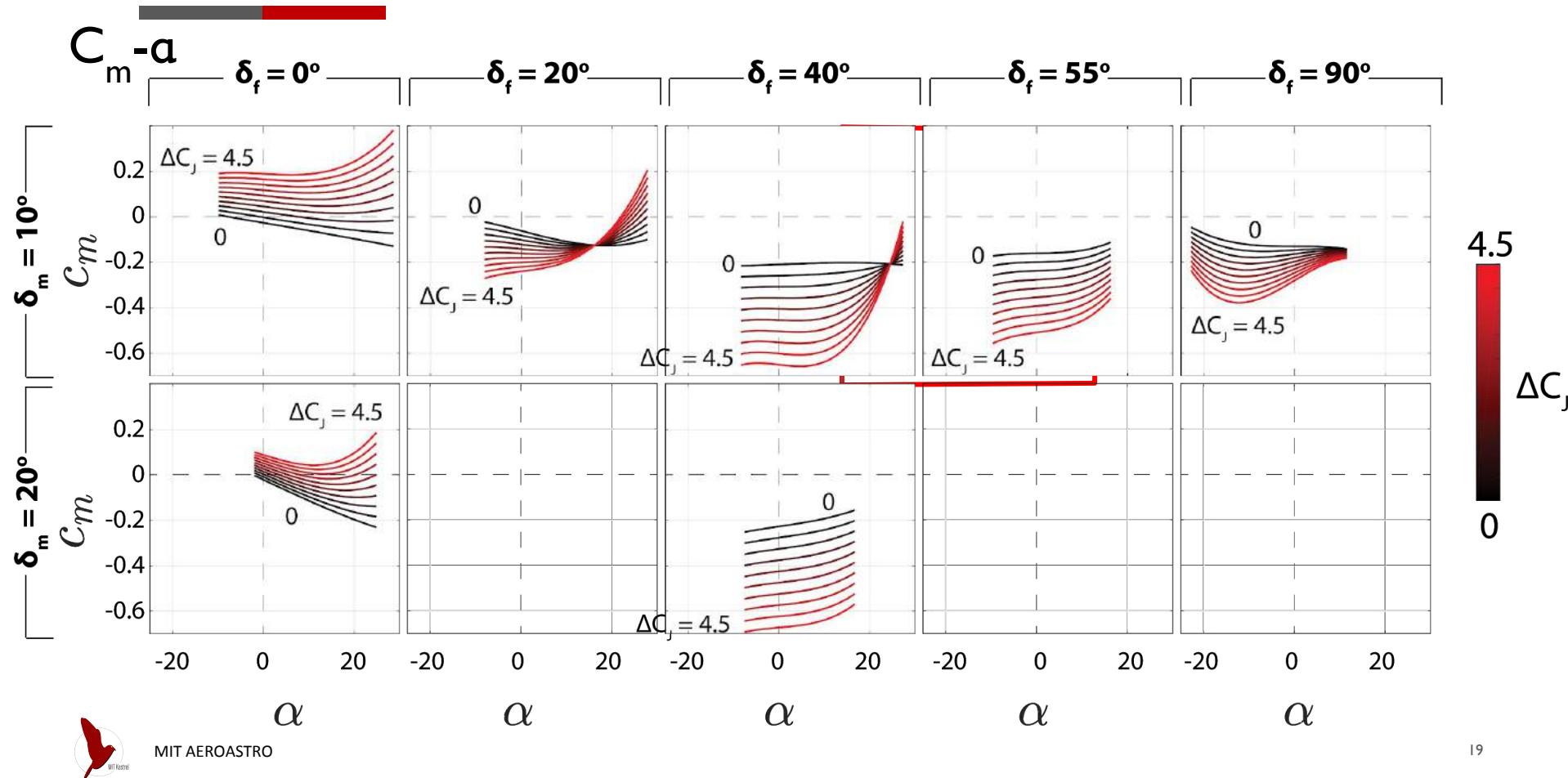
- $C_L(\Delta c_j)$  increases consistently until  $\sim \delta_f = 55^\circ$
- $C_X > 0$  for chosen landing/takeoff configurations with high lift:  $35^\circ \leq \delta_f \leq 55^\circ$
- $C_L$  is relatively insensitive to  $\delta_m$  between  $10^\circ$  and  $20^\circ \rightarrow 10^\circ \delta_m$  used for aircraft
  - 30% demonstrator is able to use blower motors for cruise
- Spanwise performance is consistent enough to conclude that motor spacing on 30% demonstrator is acceptable

## Issues

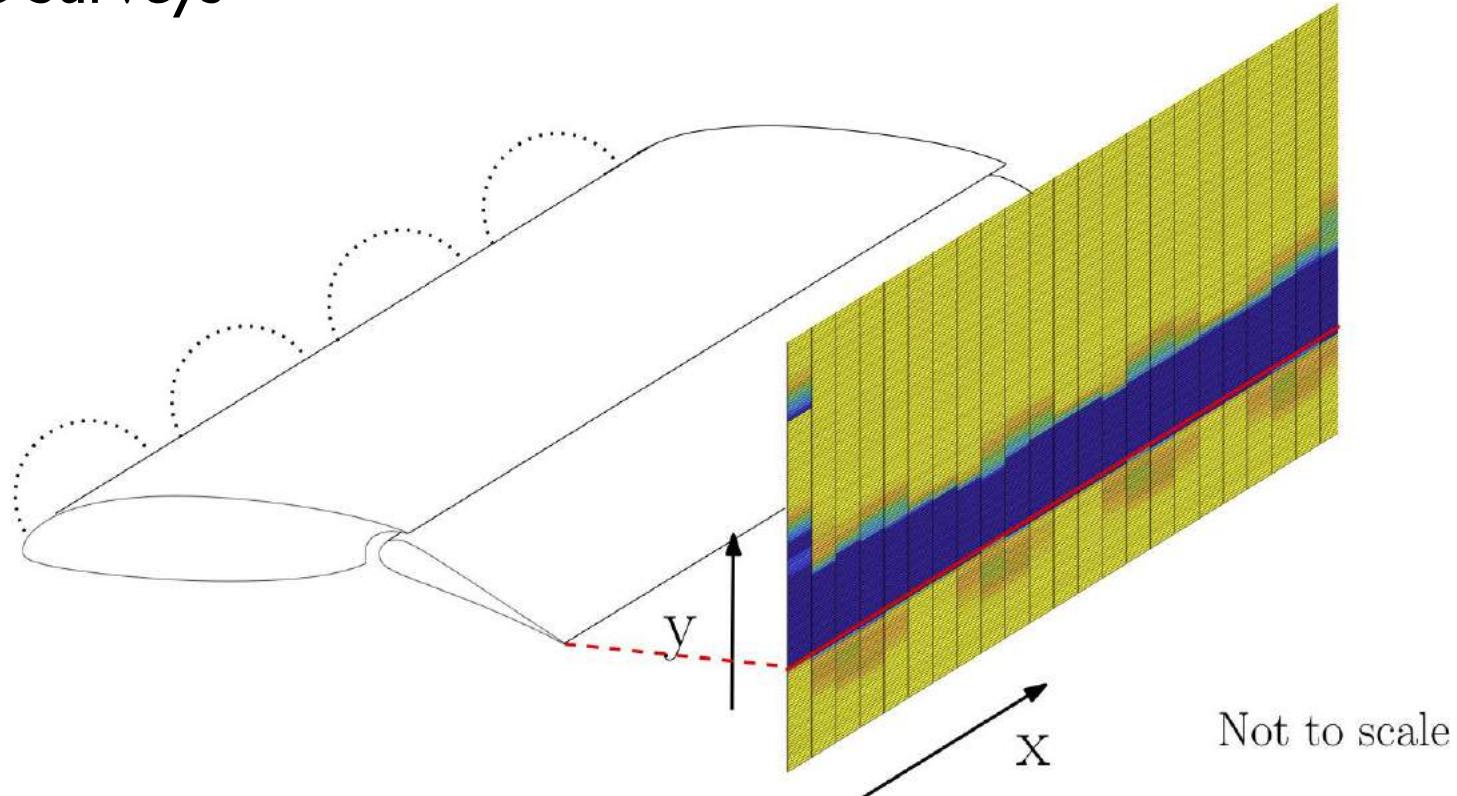
- Balance issues → data taken Spring 2019 unusable
- Time constraints → no new data taken since vehicle build began



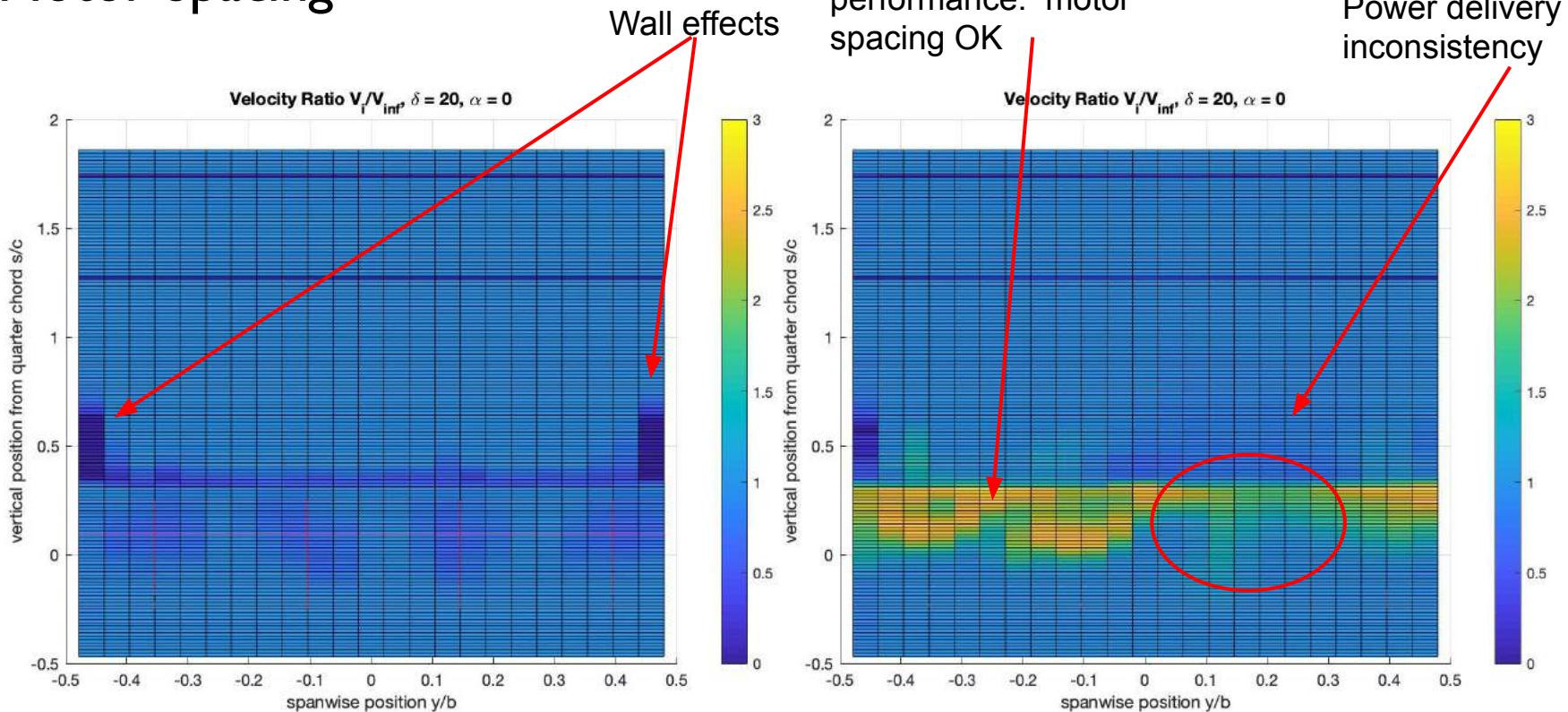




# Wake Surveys

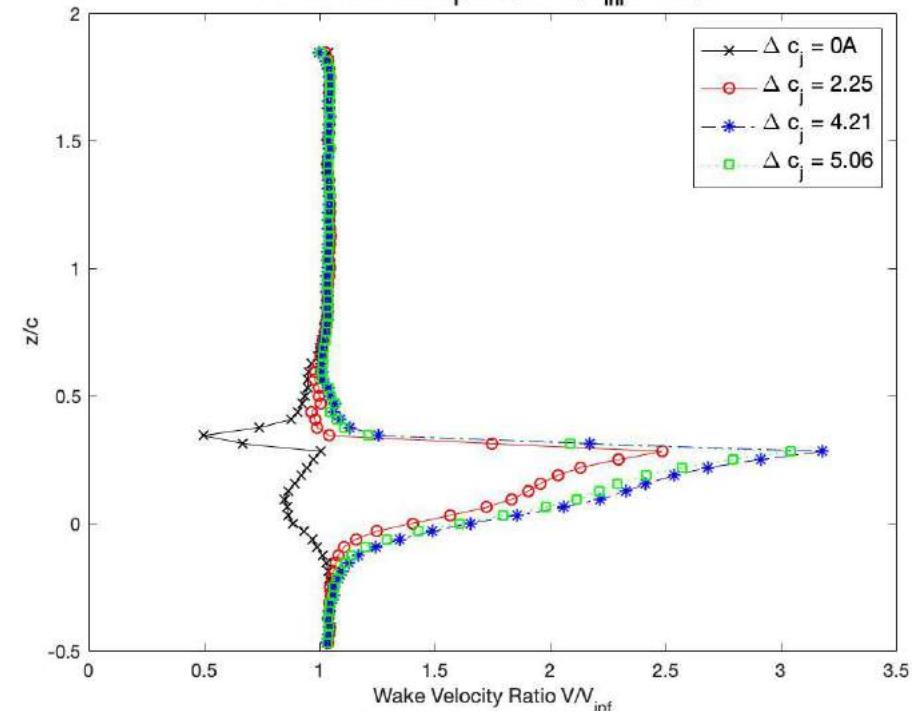


# Motor Spacing

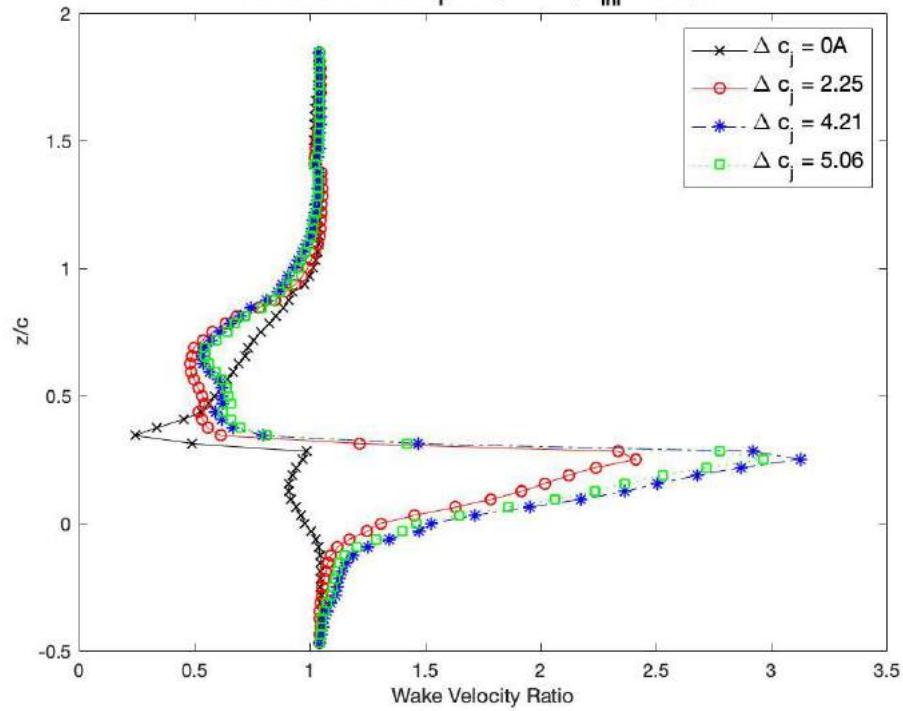


# Average Spanwise Velocity

2D Wake Profile:  $\delta_f = 20$ ,  $\alpha = 0$ ,  $V_{\text{inf}} = 20\text{mph}$



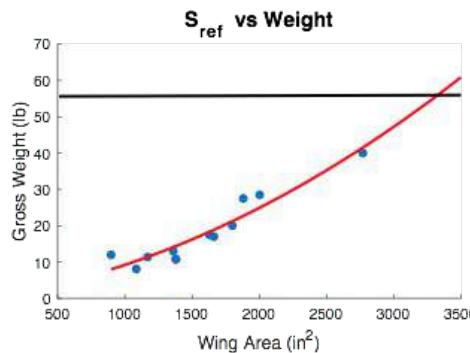
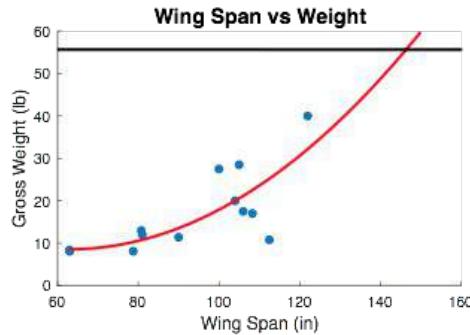
2D Wake Profile:  $\delta_f = 20$ ,  $\alpha = 10$ ,  $V_{\text{inf}} = 20\text{mph}$



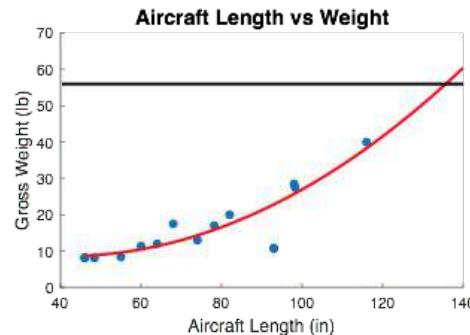


# Intro to subscale vehicle design

# Vehicle scaling, and decision for a 30% scale



**3/10 scaling parameters:**  
 $S = 2480 \text{ in}^2$   
 $b = 136 \text{ in}$



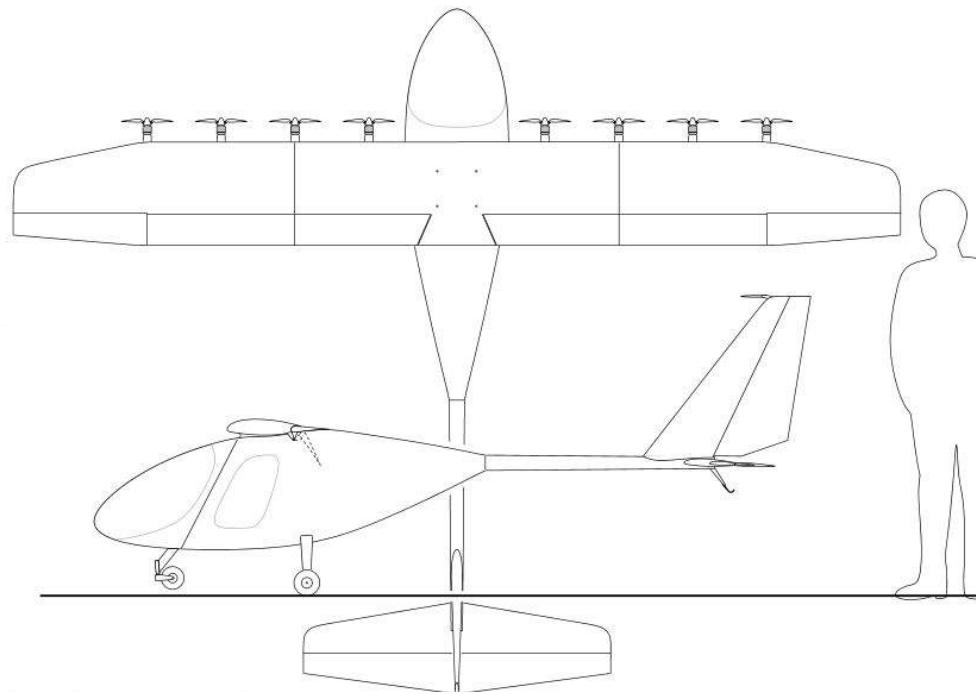
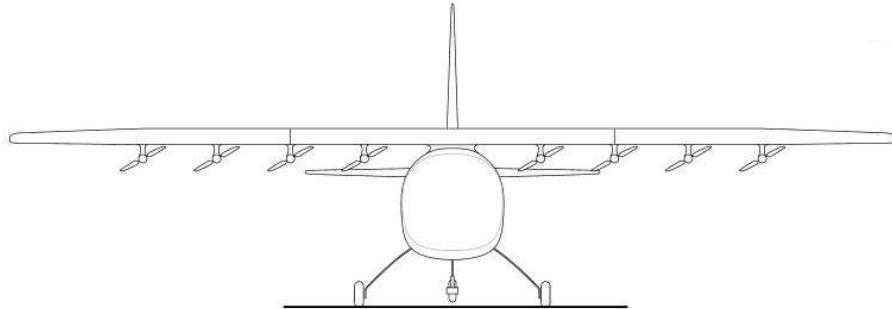
- Value was found by extrapolating RC planes on the market and finding required size to meet 55lb restriction
- 3/10 is the largest scaling we can build with margin
- Geometrically similar to the full-scale



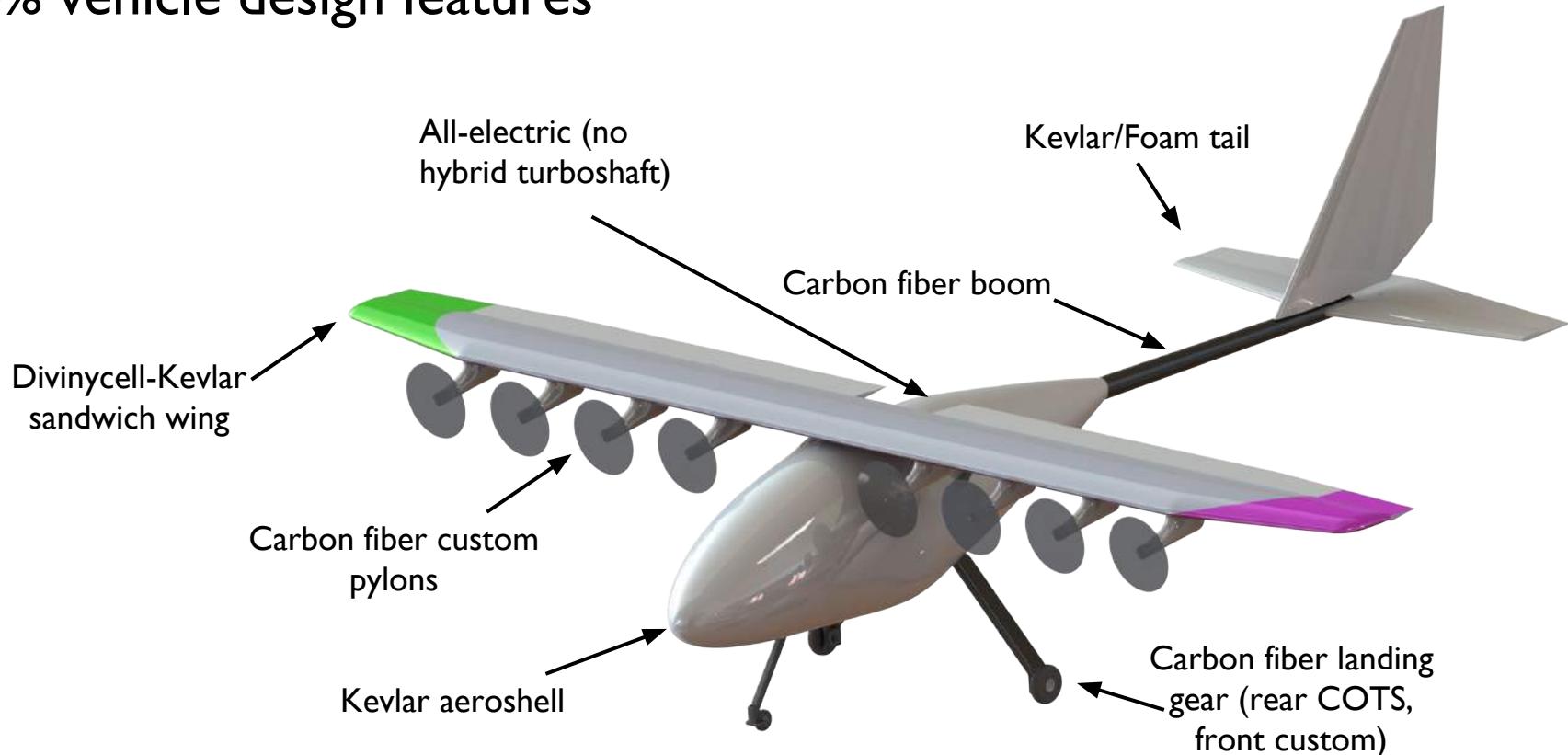
# 30% scale vehicle 3-view

**KESTREL**  
**Hybrid eSTOL**  
**30% scale POC**

Weight = 37.0 lb = 16.8 kg  
Span = 156 in = 13 ft = 3.96 m  
Area = 2640 in<sup>2</sup> = 18.33 ft<sup>2</sup> = 1.70 m<sup>2</sup>  
Vmin = 5.15 m/s = 11.5 mph (CL = 6.0)  
Vmax = 28.2 m/s = 63 mph (CL = 0.20)



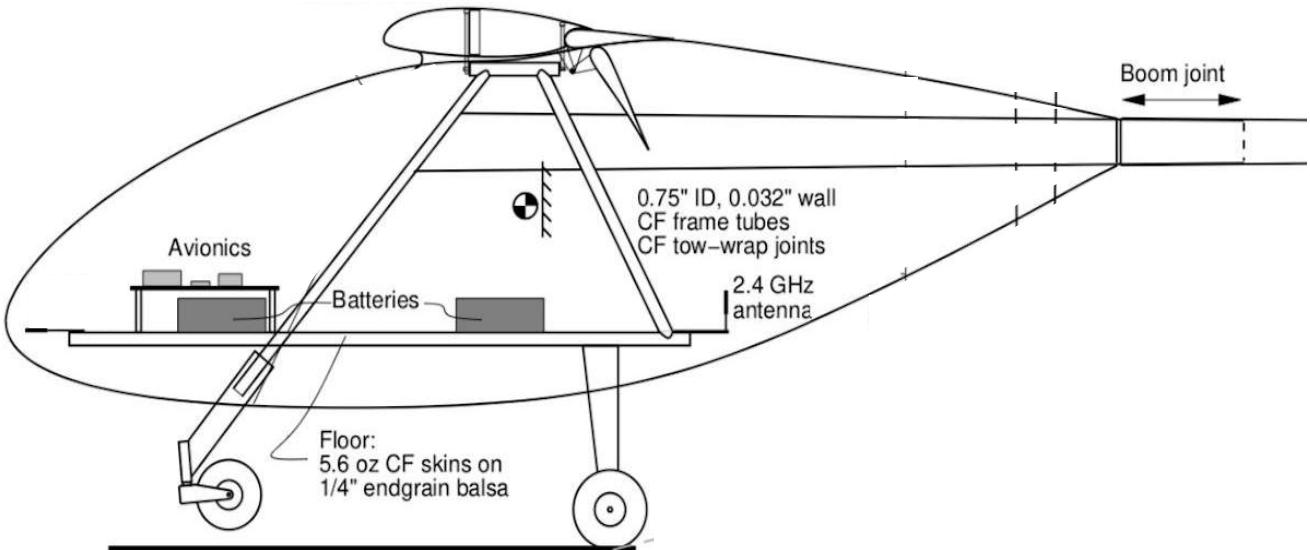
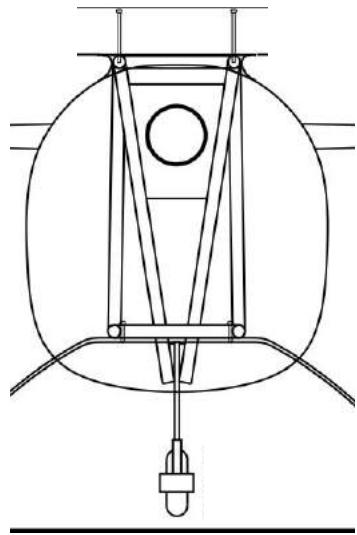
# 30% vehicle design features



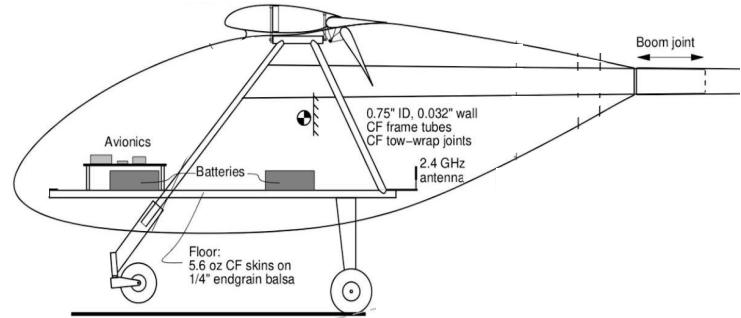
# Build report



# Truss - Motivation



# uSS - Overview



CF tow joint wraps (all  $\frac{3}{4}$ " CF tubes)

CF skins on  $\frac{1}{4}$ " divinycell foam

CF skins on  $\frac{1}{4}$ " endgrain balsa



# Truss - Joint Attachments (CF Tow Lashing)

1. Sand and Miter

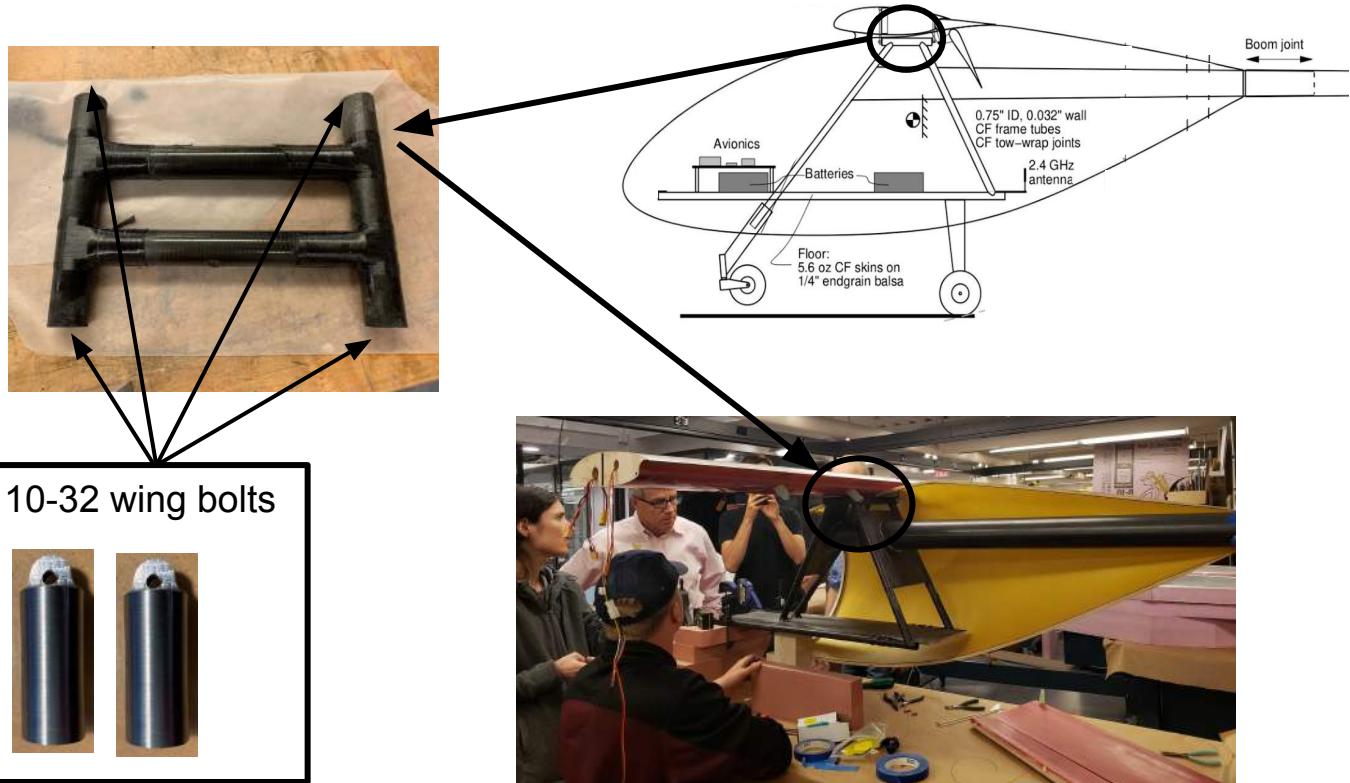


2. Wrap and Epoxy

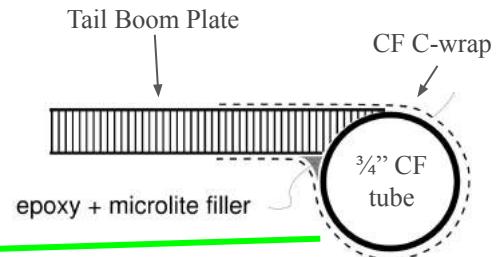


3. Heat Gun and Dry

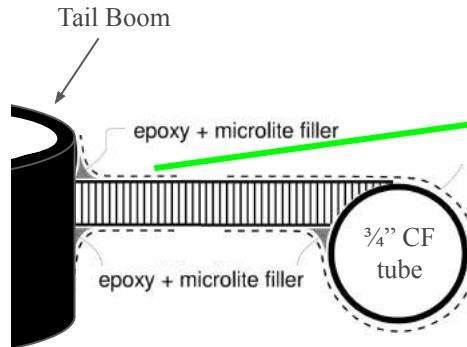




## Tail Boom Plate Attachment



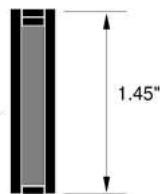
## Tail Boom Attachment



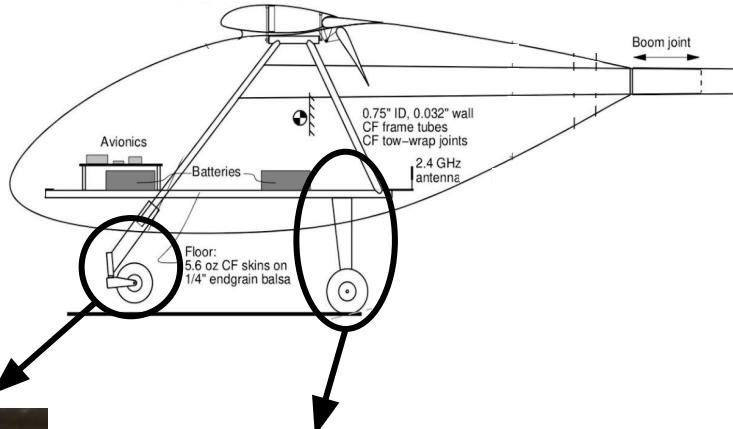
# Truss - Landing Gear

Nose Gear (made in-house)

3/16" basswood core (carbon caps)



5.6 oz CF  
sock wrap



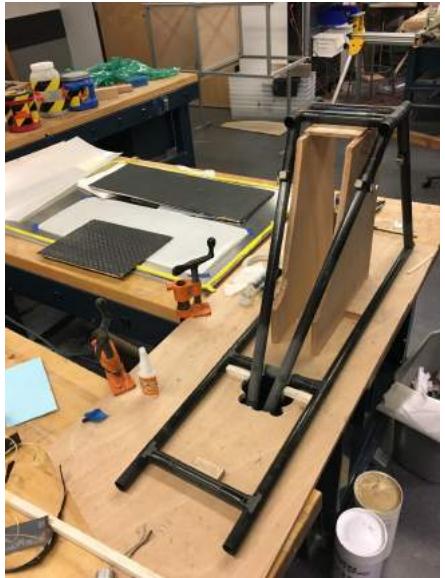
Main Gear (4.5" diameter wheels)  
(Off-the-shelf for EDG 540 42% RC Aircraft)



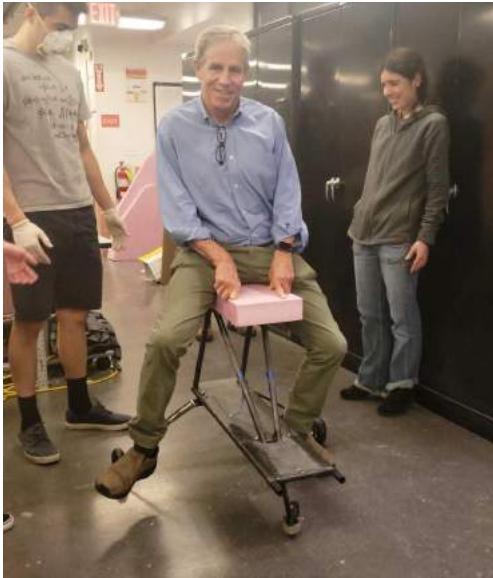
# ss - Summary

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1 - BUILD



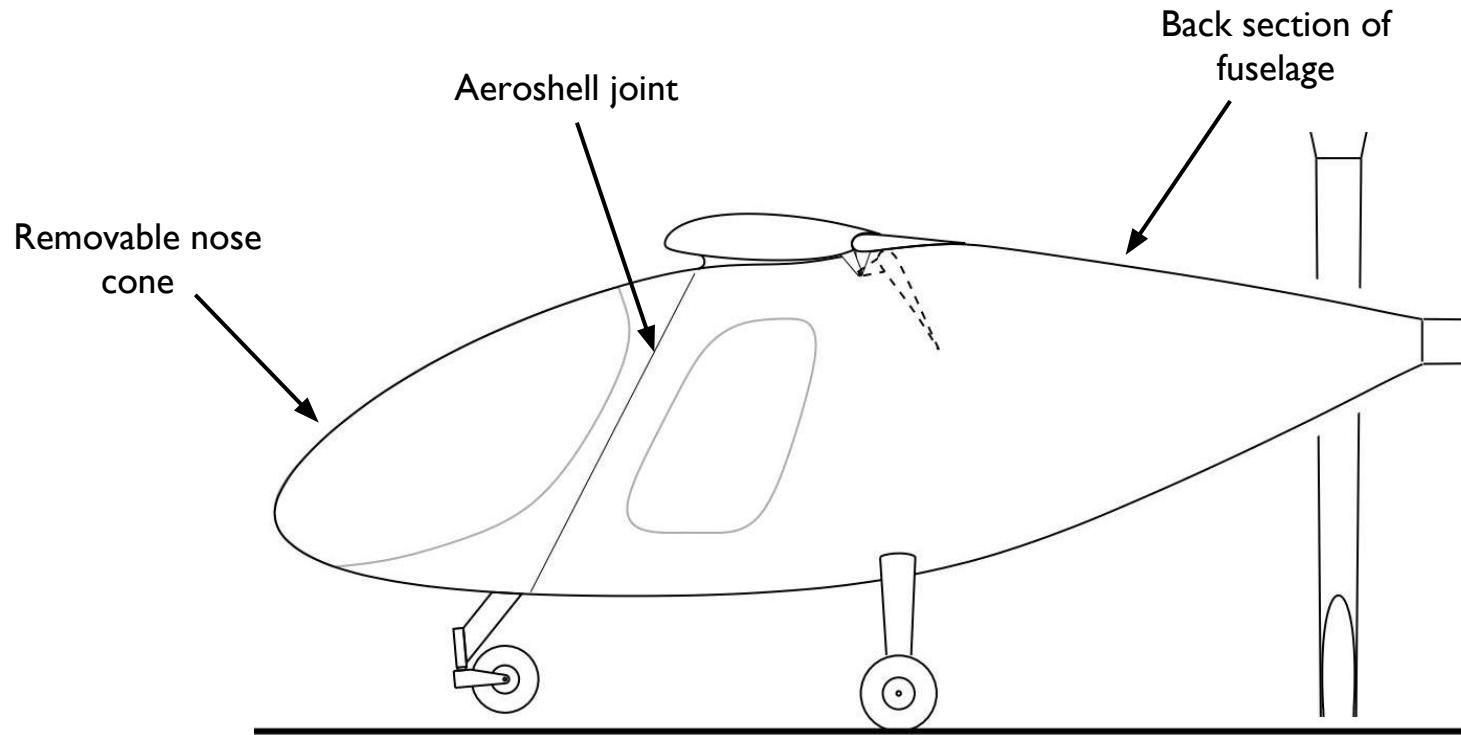
2 - TEST



3 - INTEGRATE



# Aeroshell



# Aeroshell Mold

- Four part mold
  - Two for the nose cone
  - Two for the fuselage
  - Split vertically down the middle
- Foam molds
  - Renshape expensive and time-consuming
- Routed in 3 layers for each of the four parts

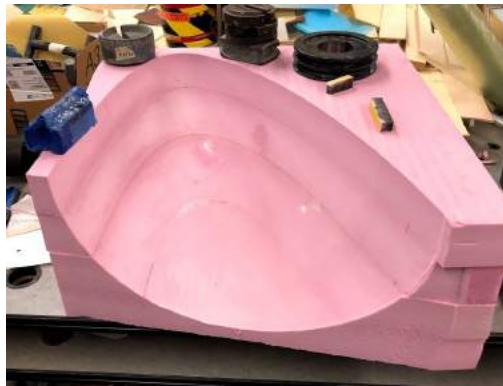


# Aeroshell Mold Manufacturing

1. Route foam layers.



2. Align and glue layers together to create left and right molds.



3. Add 2 layers of 3.5 oz satin-weave fiberglass (and epoxy).



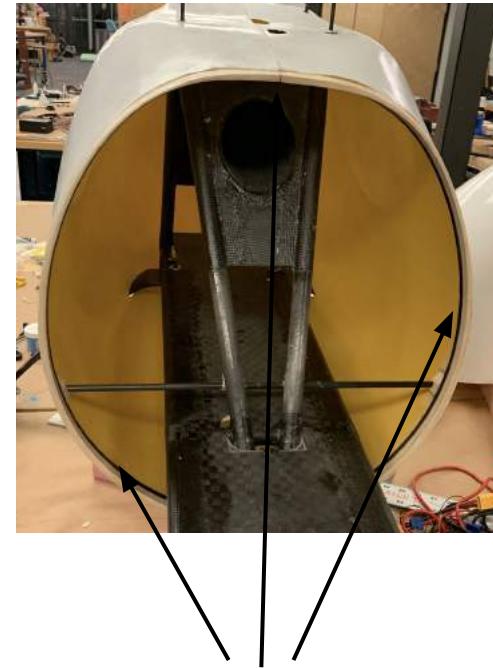
4. Trim excess fiberglass.

5. Wet-sand.

# Aeroshell Manufacturing



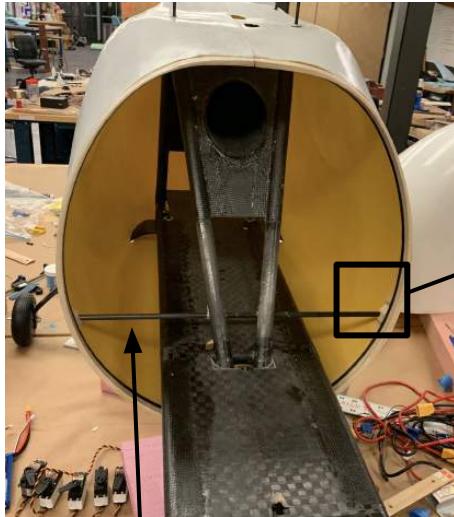
Layup: 3 layers of 1.7 oz Kevlar with  
epoxy



Carbon/balsa strips coated in  
fiberglass and epoxy



# Aeroshell - Truss Attachment



Hollow carbon tube attached to truss; tube filled with epoxy and threaded; screws pass through pads



Basswood pads coated in fiberglass attached to inside of aeroshell

Aeroshell constrained by wing attachments

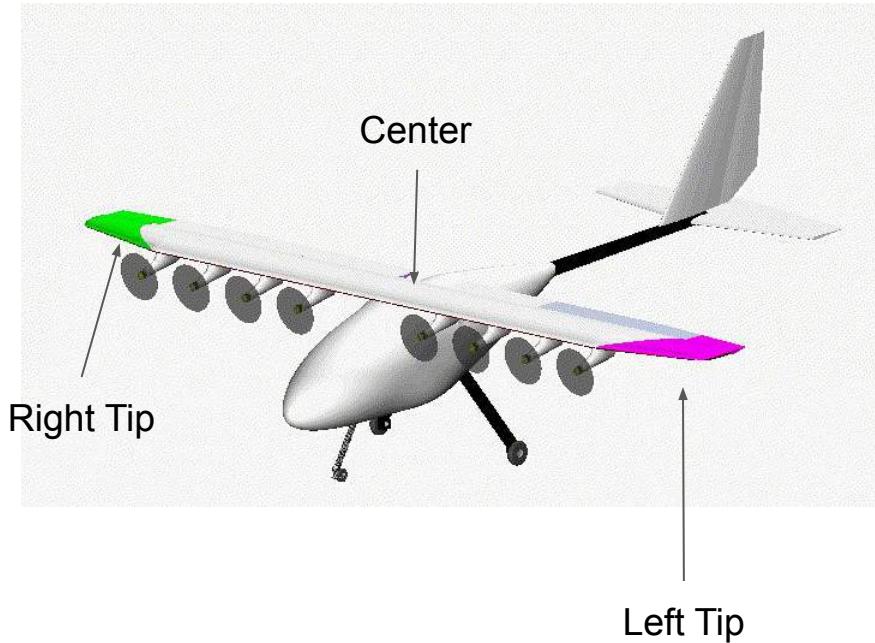


Cut-outs for truss/landing gear constrain the aeroshell

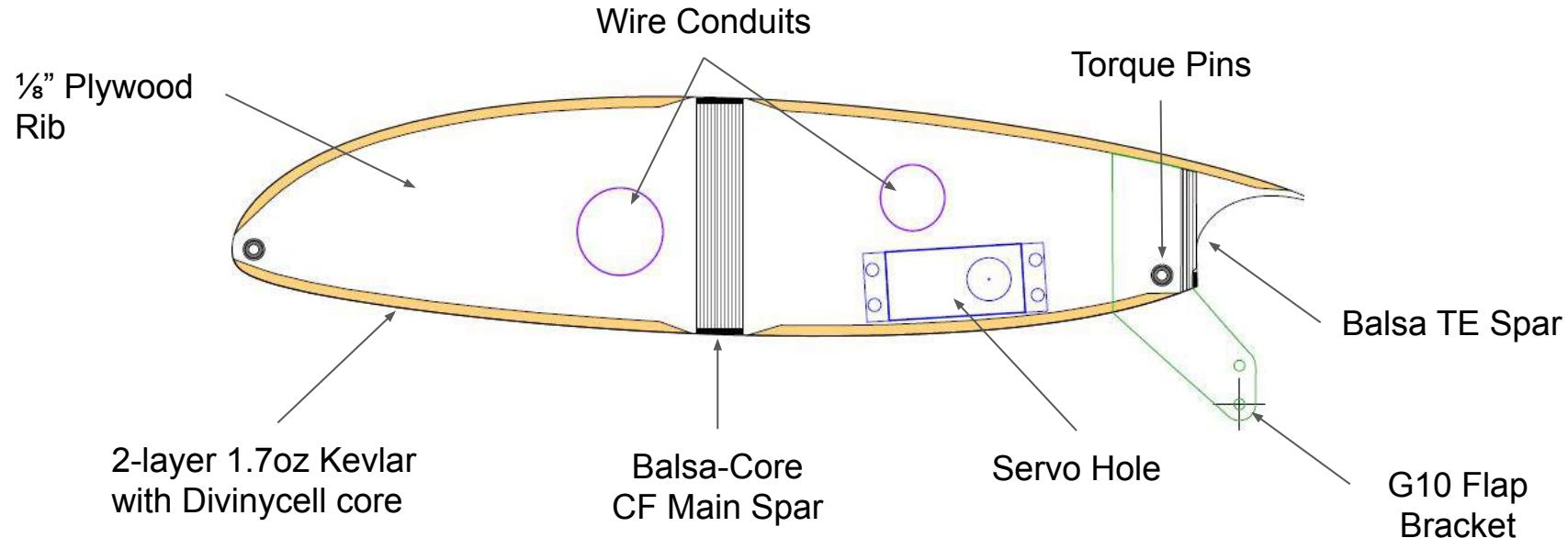


# Wing

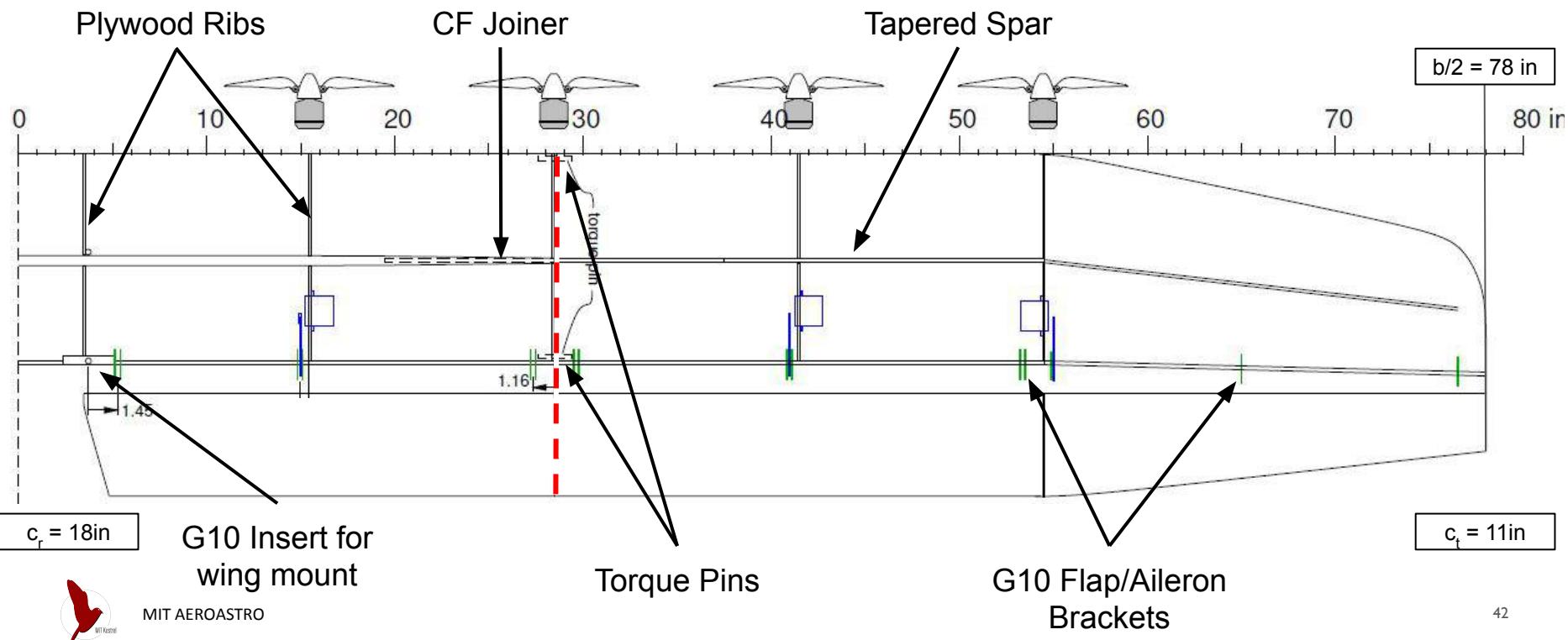
- Divided into 3 sections for:
  - Machinability
  - Transportability
- Split top and bottom for manufacturing



# Wing - Cross Section



# Wing - Half-Span



Route out of Renshape

# Wing - Molds

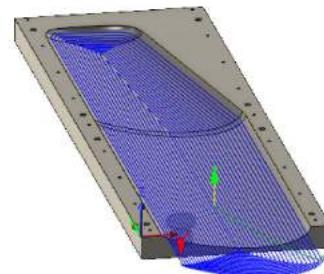
Wing CAD Model



Mold CAD Model



CAM Model



Sand, seal with  
epoxy, polish



Wax and Buff

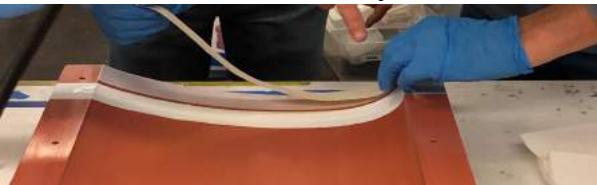


# Wing - Test Layup

Base epoxy on top of painted mold



First Kevlar layer



Remove wax paper



Apply epoxy



Add foam core and prepare next layer of Kevlar



Hold foam core and second layer of Kevlar



Be careful not to move foam out of position



Add bleeder and breather



Seal mold in vacuum bag until cured

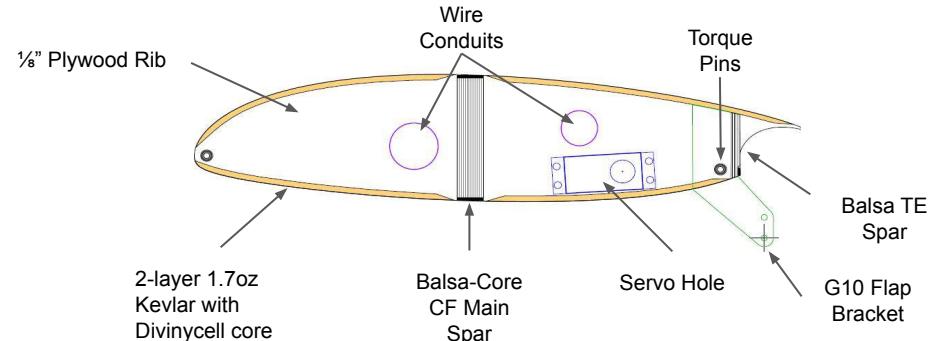


# Wing - Layups



MIT AeroAstro

# Wing - Internal Components

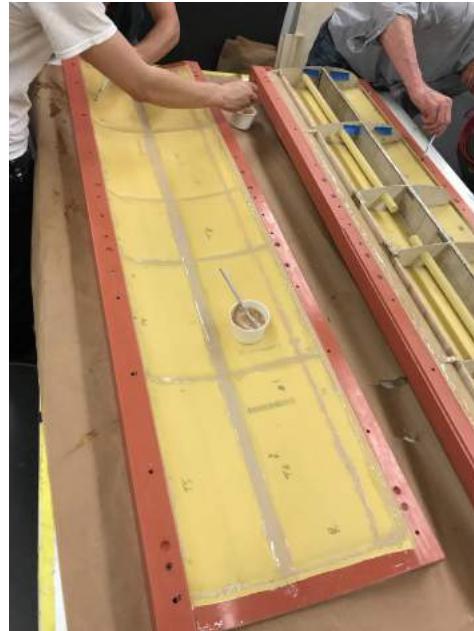


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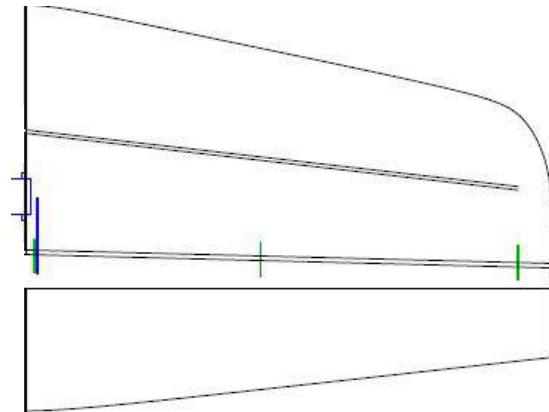
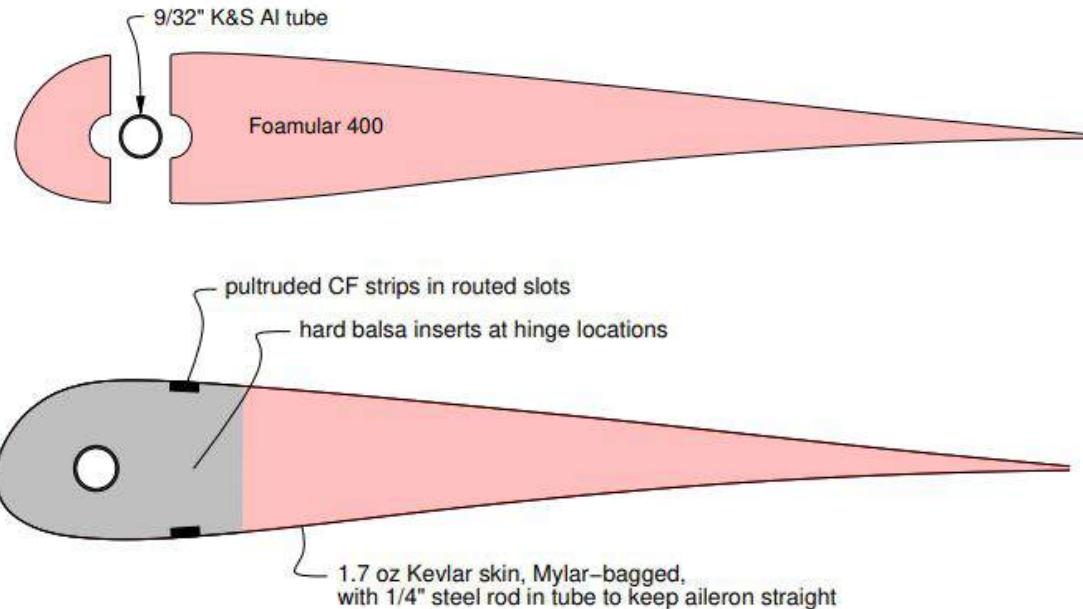
Cut out in TE spar for  
flap bracket

# Wing - Closed and Joined

- Closing process
  - Epoxy everything with light-weight thickeners (cabosil)
  - Close
  - Re-epoxy
  - Close and clamp



# Ailerons

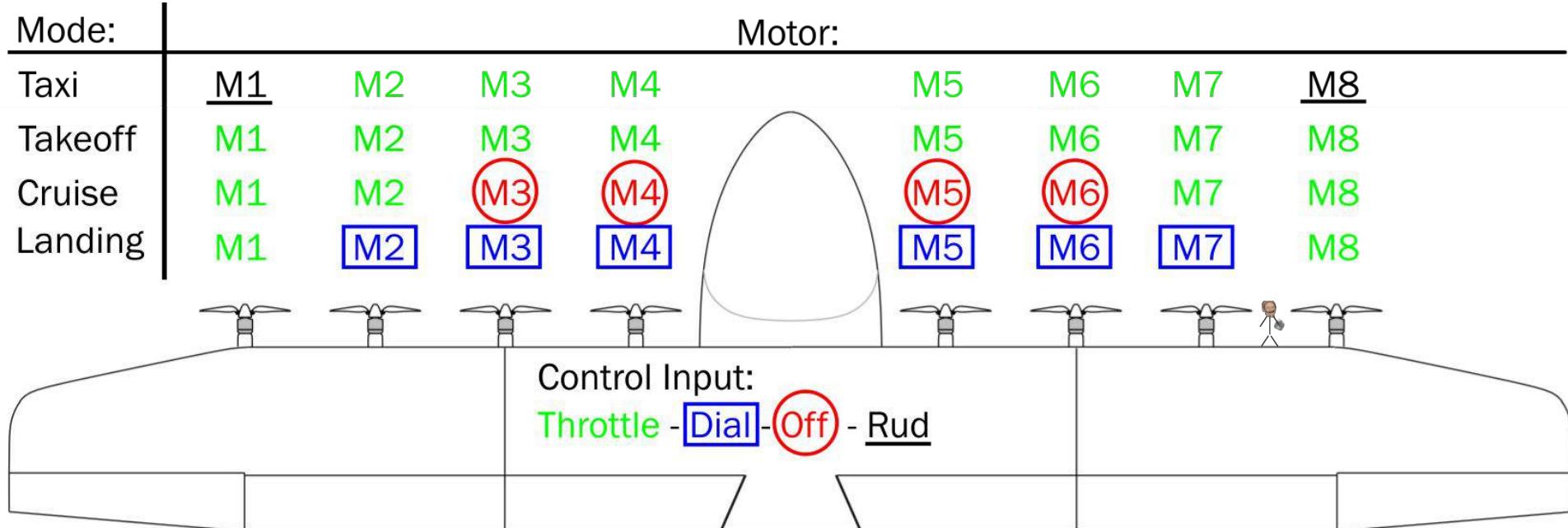


# Avionics: Vehicle Control Modes

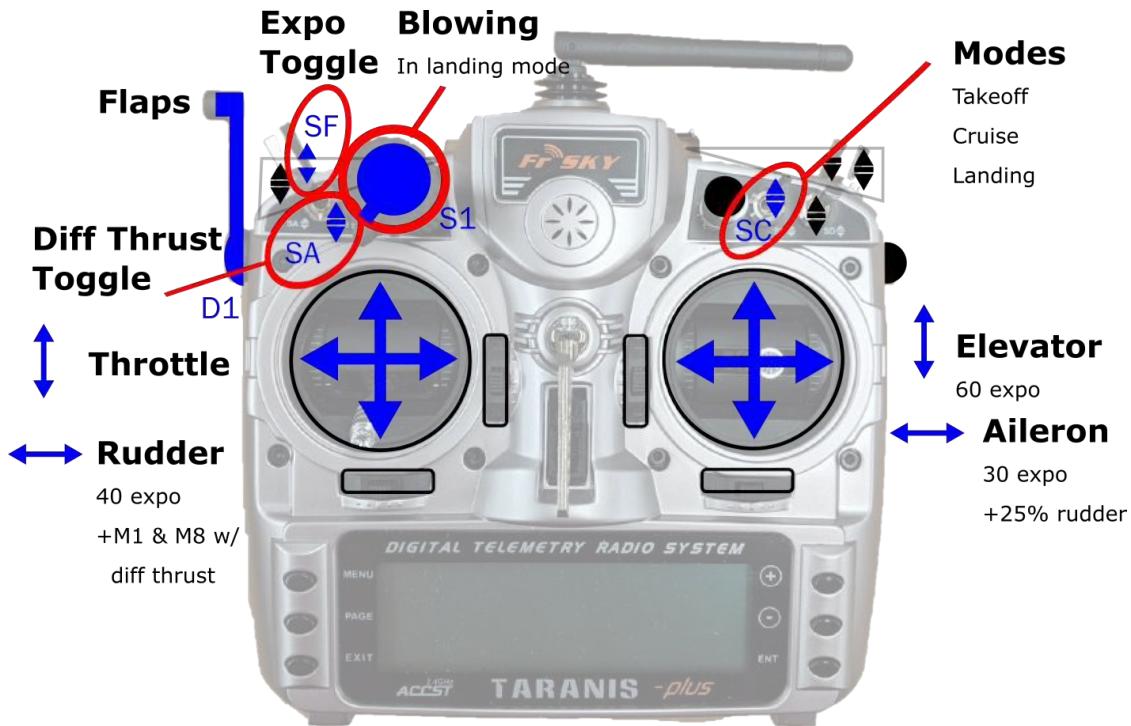
Taxi	Take-off	Cruise	Landing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Differential thrust switch on transmitter</li><li>- Addable in any mode</li><li>- Used in “Take-off” mode</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Allows full blowing take-off</li><li>- All motors tied to throttle stick</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Allows steady flight at less than full thrust</li><li>- Outer four motors tied to throttle stick</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Allows blowing and glide-path control in landing</li><li>- Outer two motors tied to throttle stick</li><li>- Inner six motors tied to upper dial</li></ul>
<p><b>All Modes:</b> Normal RC control for pitch, yaw and roll. Flaps tied to dial on left side of Tx. Exponential toggle and differential thrust toggle available in all modes.</p>			



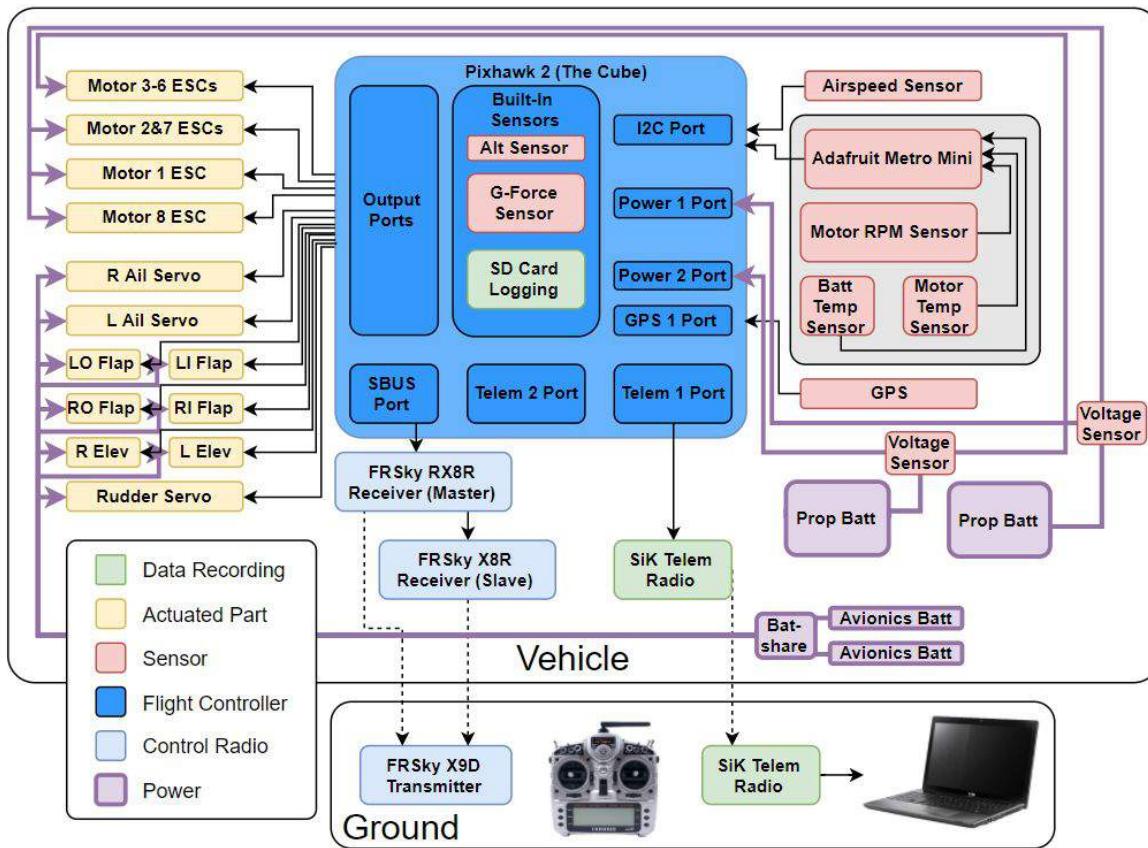
# Avionics: Vehicle Control Modes



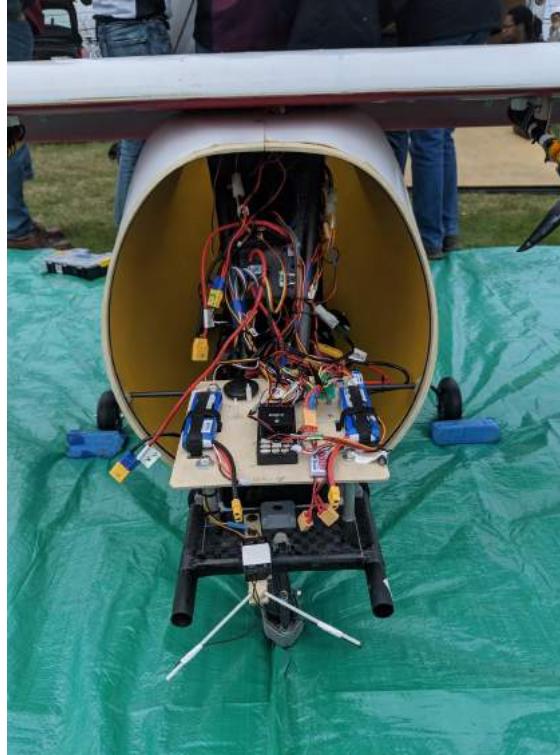
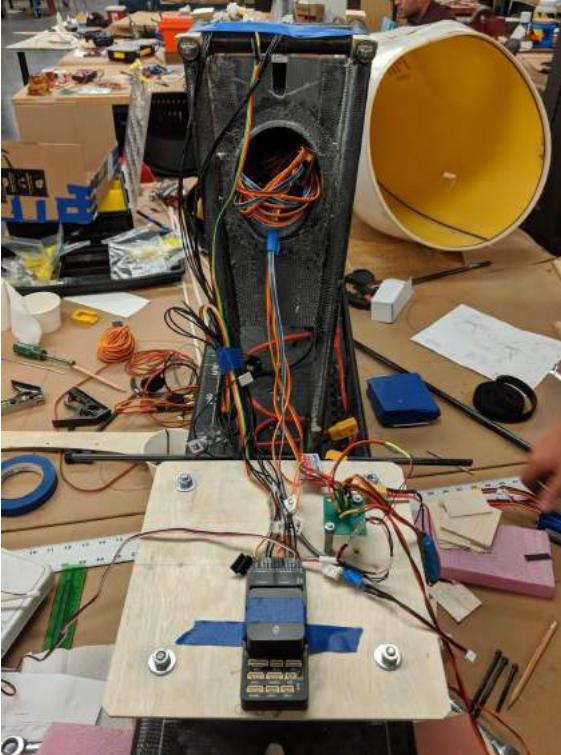
# Avionics: Vehicle Control



# Avionics: Block Diagram



# Avionics: Implementation



# Avionics: Software and Flight Controller

## Pixhawk 2 “The Cube”

- Serves as RC signal passthrough
- Collects telemetry including PWM levels, airspeed, GPS, orientation, and battery status
- Powered on 7.7V avionics bus with 5V BEC

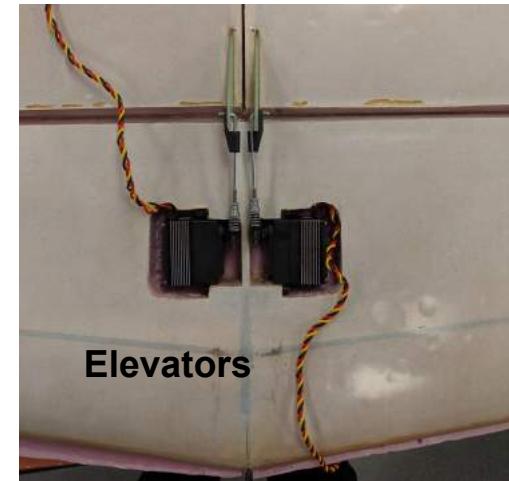
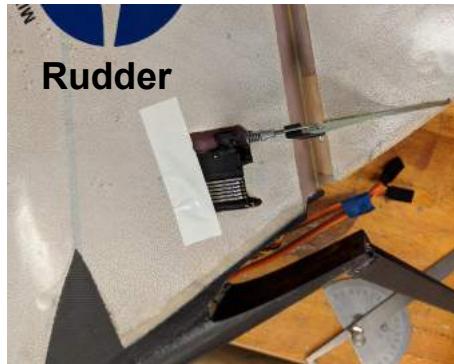
## Arduplane:

- “RCPassThru” for Aux and Main servo pins
- Relatively closed but user friendly flight control software
- Working on custom telemetry for propulsion



# Avionics: Servos

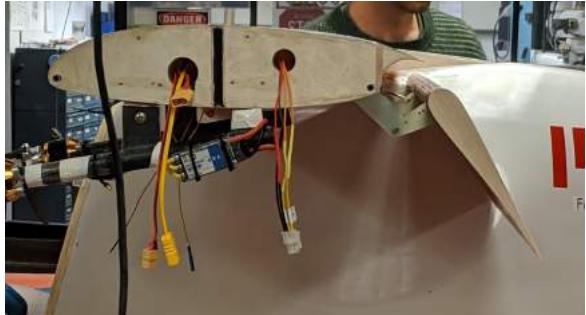
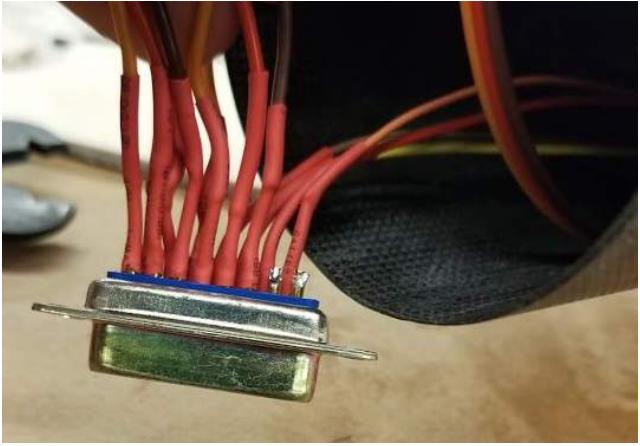
- HiTech HS-7955 and 7950 high torque servos
- Installed post-production
- Powered by two 2200mAh 2s LiPo batteries on a 7.7V avionics bus
- Reversed in transmitter
- Tuned with transmitter
- Jitter issue



# Avionics: Signal and Power Routing

- Rear wing conduit: servo signal and power wires 4 pin connectors coming from the wing center
- 4 pin connector at the wing break for the aileron and outer flap
- Elevator, rudder, pitot tube routed through the tail to a 15 pin connector 3x3 servo wires 4 for the pitot tube at the tail break
- Goes to aeroshell to plug into the pixhawk
- Power distribution and sensing

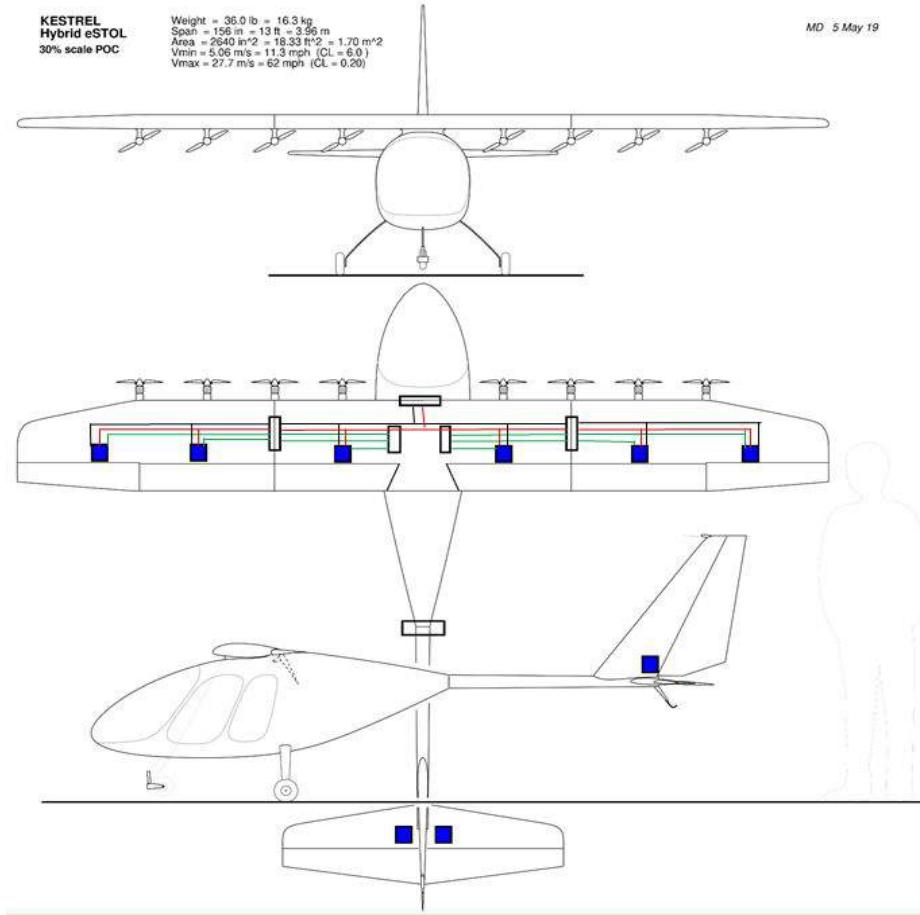




KESTREL  
Hybrid eSTOL  
30% scale POC

Weight = 36.0 lb = 16.3 kg  
Span = 156 in = 13 ft = 3.96 m  
Area = 2640 in<sup>2</sup> = 18.33 ft<sup>2</sup> = 1.70 m<sup>2</sup>  
Vmin = 5.06 m/s = 11.3 mph (CL = 6.0)  
Vmax = 27.7 m/s = 62 mph (CL = 0.20)

MD: 5 May 19



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# Propulsion Overview

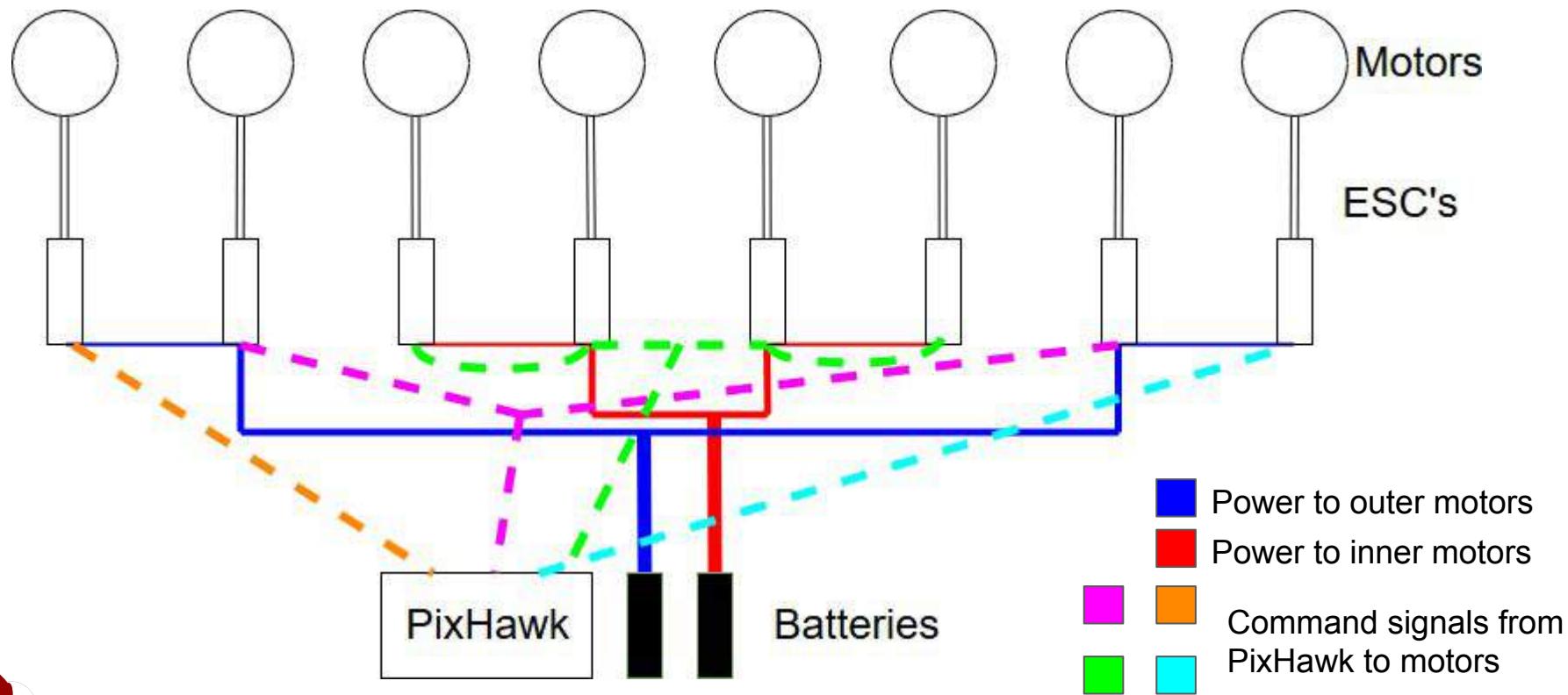
- 5000 W Nominal Installed Power - 8 motors x 625W per motor
- As designed: 11 minutes of full power flight time
- Carbon fiber pylons for attachment to the wing
- Two batteries powering 4 motors each



*Motor on test stand in front of 1.5'x1.5' wind tunnel*

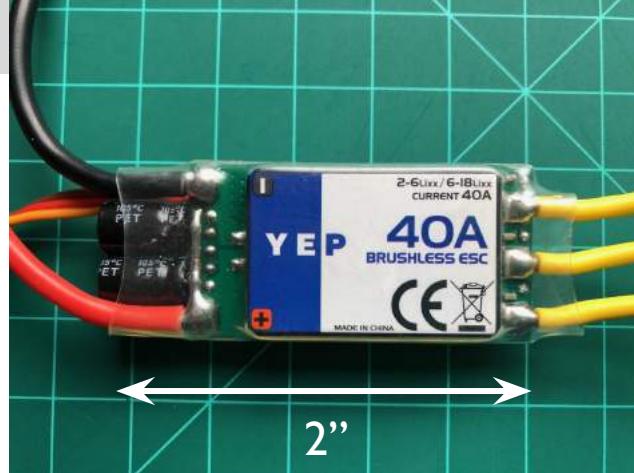


# Propulsion wiring



# Propulsion components

- **ESC model:** YEP 40A
- **Motor model:**  
Scorpion  
SII-3014-830KV
- **Propellers:** Aeronaut  
9x6 folding props
- **Batteries:** MaxAmps  
6S 16,000 mAh (x2)

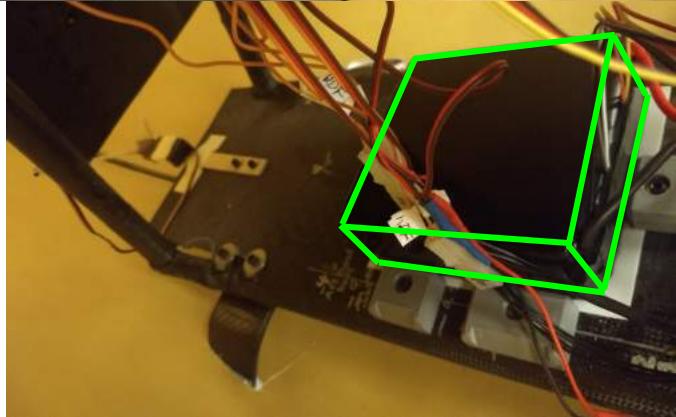
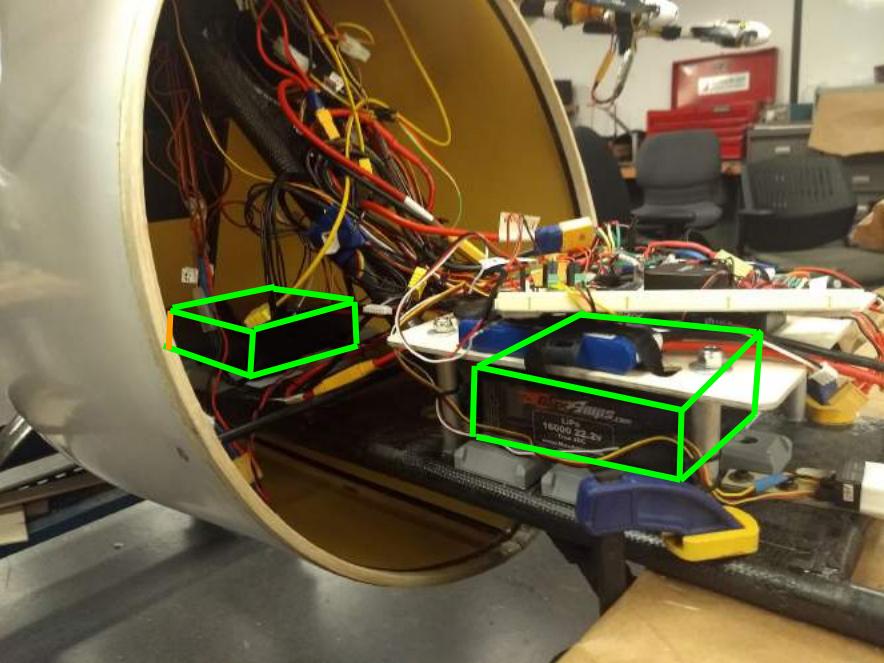


6" x 6" x 1.5"



## Battery Sizing:

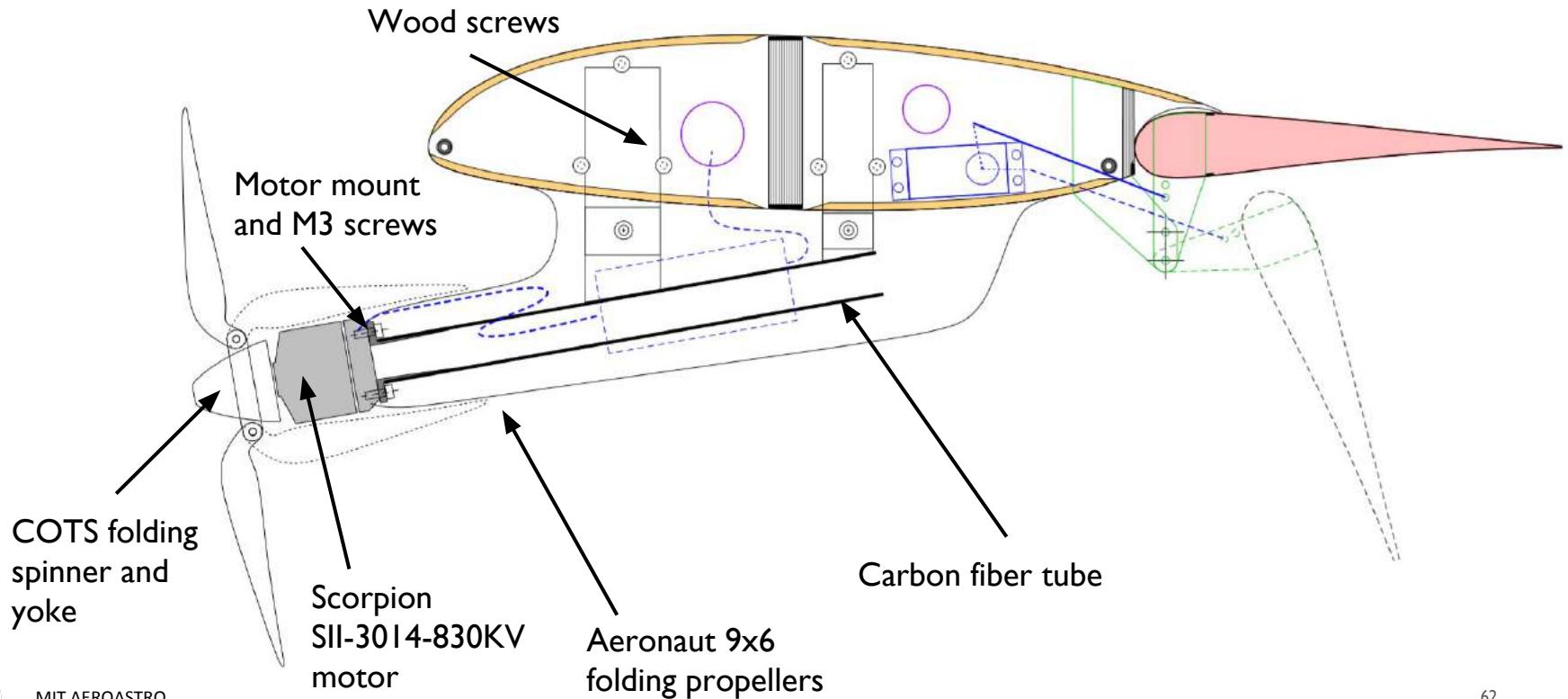
- 6S batteries for power delivery
- Full power flight time scales linearly with capacity
- 2x 4.4lb batteries provide a total of 32 amp-hours capacity and 11 minutes flight time
- Can upscope to 4x batteries to provide 22 minutes flight time



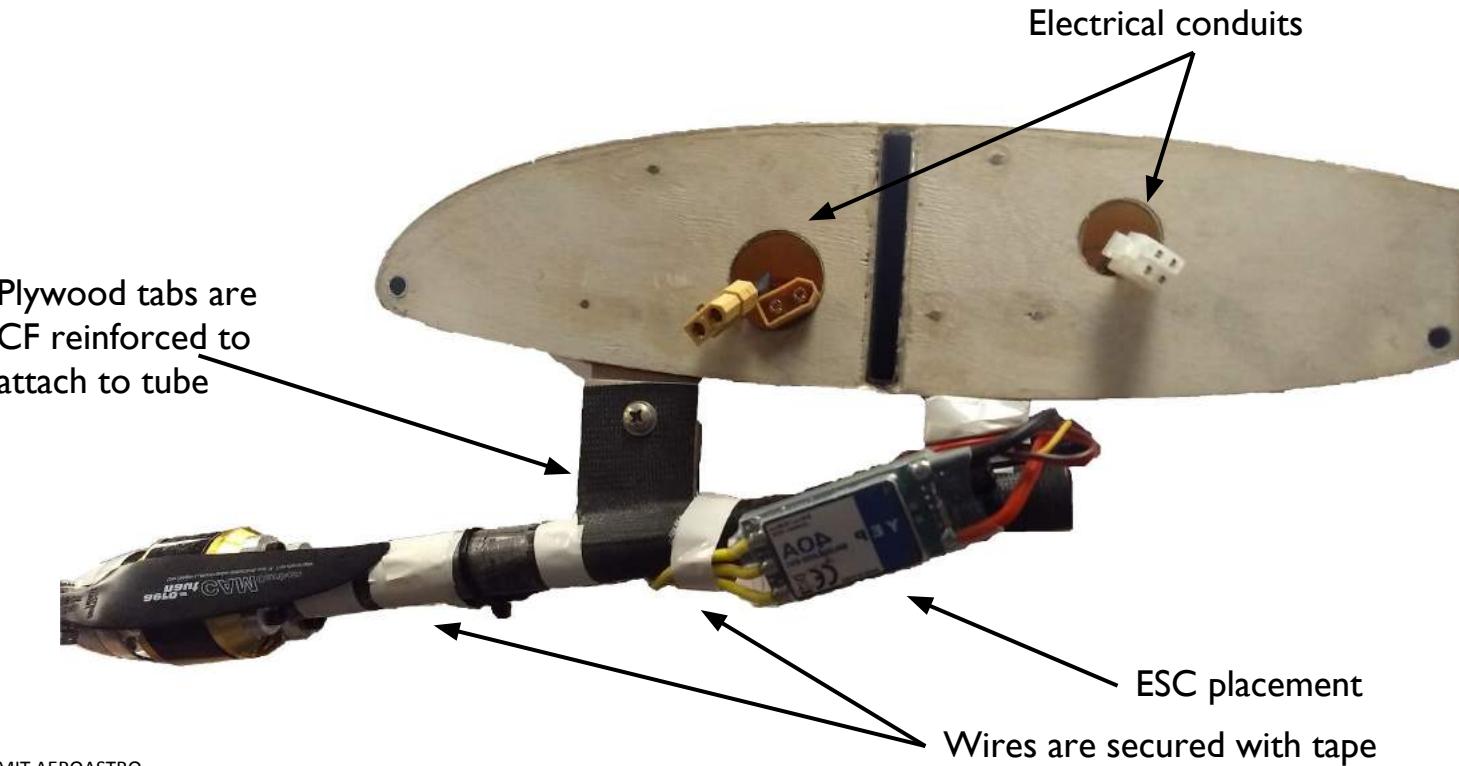
Rear battery can be moved to adjust CG

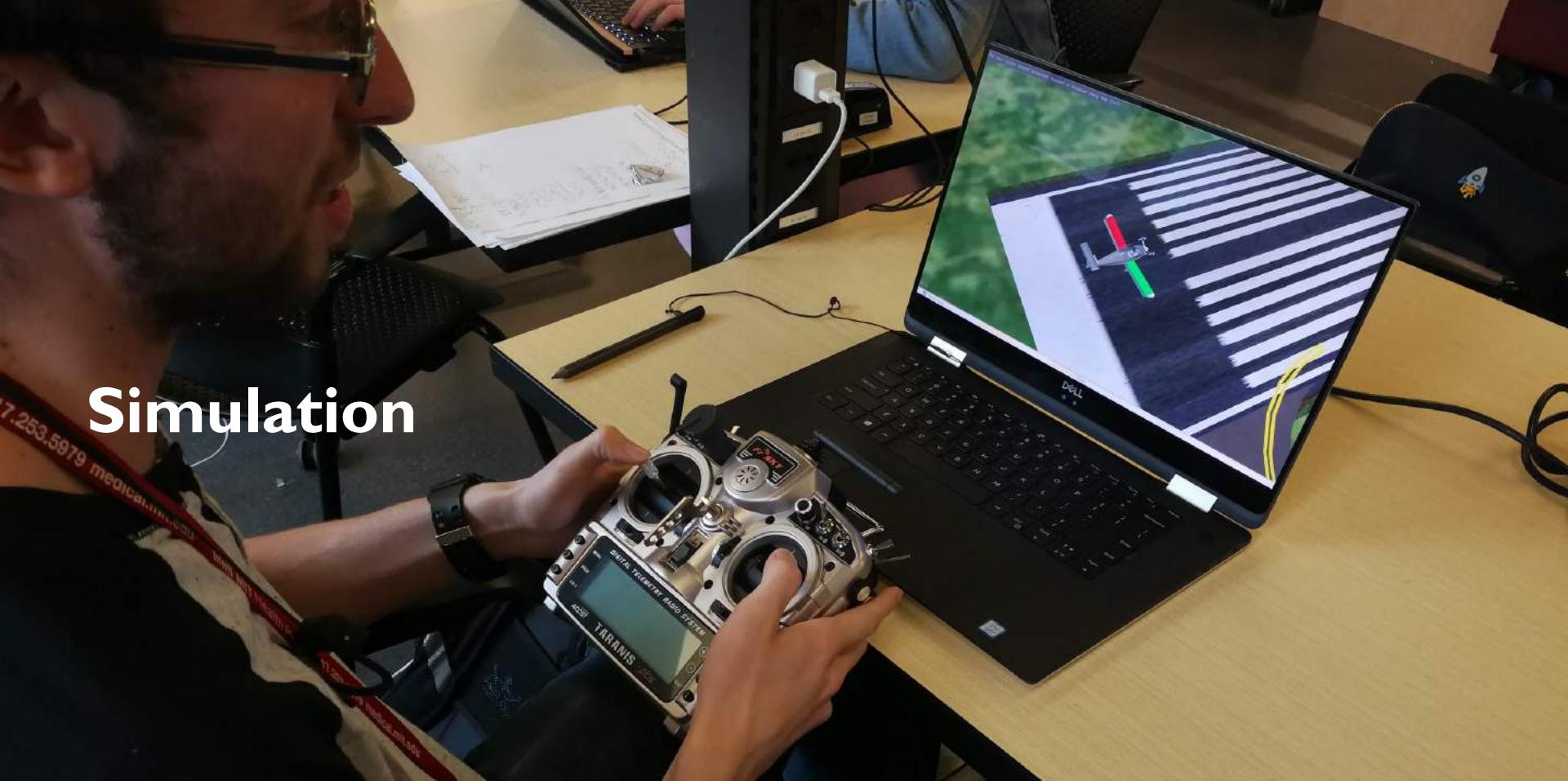


# Propulsion hardware: as-designed



# Propulsion hardware: as-built





# Simulation



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# Goal of simulation

- Risk mitigation for the 30% scale flight test
  - Risk of damage to aircraft
  - Time risk of ‘figuring out’ aircraft
- Train pilot prior to flying the 30% scale vehicle
  - Get a ‘feel’ for the aircraft
  - Establish a comfortable control scheme
  - Determine aircraft configurations for different maneuvers

*\*Initial idea was to use simulation as a primary program-level risk mitigation for aircraft, but time delays prevented this*

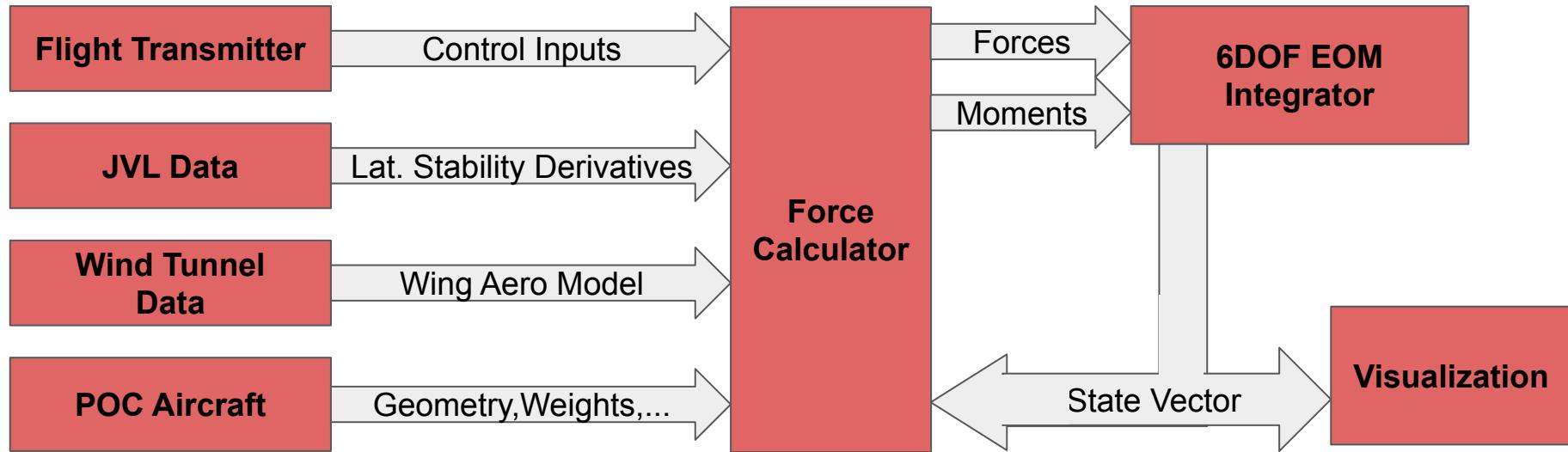


# Why build a simulator?

- The vehicle has atypical  $C_L$ ,  $C_X$ ,  $C_Y$ ,  $C_m$ ,  $C_n$ ,  $C_l$  values due to blowing
- Need to model these coefficients using mainly WT data (when possible)
- For example, before stall:  $C_L = C_{L(\text{wing})} + C_{L(\text{tail})}$ 
  - From WT best-fit  
(function of  $\delta_r$ ,  $a$ ,  $\Delta C_j$ )
  - From JVL
- Additional control inputs
  - Flaps
  - Different distributed propulsion modes (individual inboard/outboard motor control)



# Overview of simulator



## Simulator features

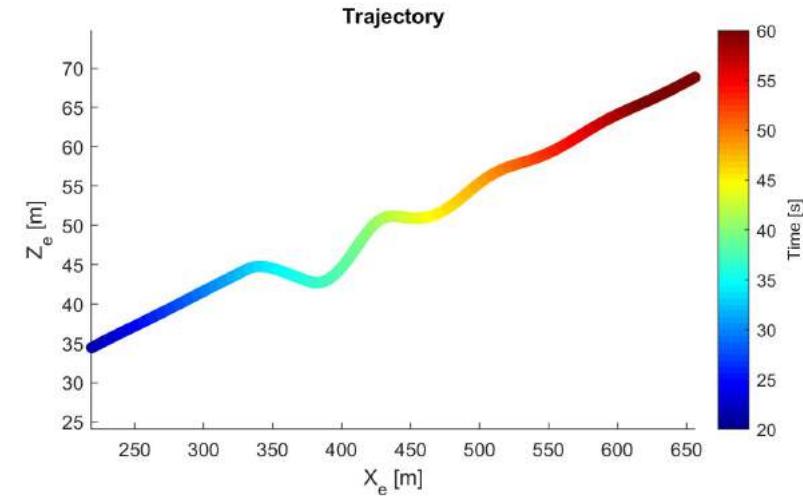
- 6-DOF simulation
- **Aerodynamic model:** Incorporates 16.82 WT data, JVL derivatives and post-stall experimental data
- **Propulsion model:** modelled from QPROP
- **Control input:** FrSky Taranis X9D Plus (closely replicate flight test control scheme)
- **Visualization:** Optimized for RC piloting through FlightGear  
(takes place in a poorly rendered Plum Island!)



# Benchmark test ( $3^\circ$ , 4 sec down elevator singlet @ $0^\circ$ flaps)

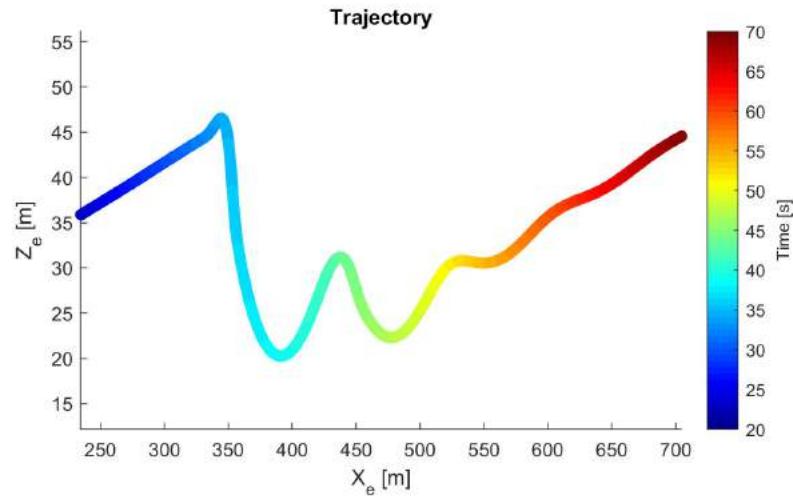
Main takeaway: simulator accurately captures aircraft's phugoid

$f_{\text{analytic}} \approx 0.16 \text{ Hz}$  (only an approximation),  $f_{\text{simulator}} = 0.142 \text{ Hz}$



# Benchmark test (stall /w 7°, 4 sec up elevator singlet @ 0° flaps)

Main takeaway: aircraft stalls as expected, exhibits natural fixed-stick stall recovery



# Pilot feedback

- Professor Drela accumulated ~1 hour of flight time on the simulator
- Simulator aided in getting a feel for the aircraft's:
  - Response characteristics
  - Control throws
  - Damping
  - Flap-pitch coupling effects & associated trims
  - General behaviour
- Reduced time taken to get used to aircraft from 10 min to 30 sec
- 30% scale vehicle felt similar to simulator



# Next Steps for Simulation

- Now have more confidence in physical accuracy of simulator due to similarity with flight test
- Still, flight data can be used to inform and improve the simulation dynamics
- Next focus of the simulator is to help determine optimal flap-blowing configurations for SSTOL objectives
  - To help mitigate the descent glide path risk





15% scale



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73

# Motivation for and fabrication of 15% scale vehicle

- Motivation
  - Prepares pilot to fly larger-scale vehicle
  - 15% scale flies “visually similar” to 30% scale
    - Proportional mobility
- Manufacturing
  - Foam fuselage, wings, flaps, and ailerons
  - Balsa tail
  - Plywood brackets and horns
  - 4 servos on wings (2 flaps, 2 aileron)
  - 2 servos on fuselage (1 rudder, 1 elevator)
  - Four motors total (2 on each wing)



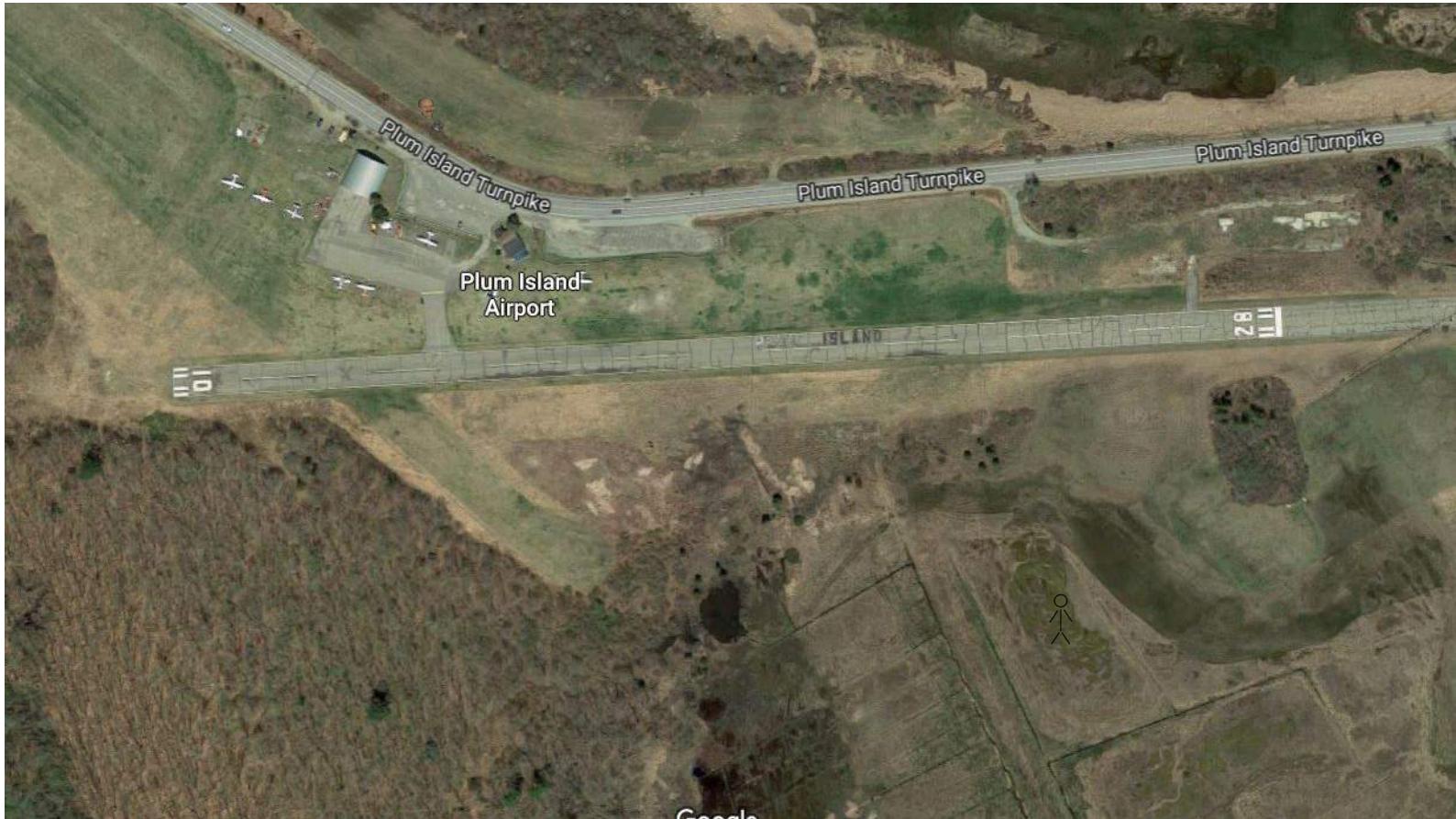
# First Test Flight





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# PLUM ISLAND, MA (2B2) | May 4th, 2019





Aircraft Assembly

Avionics and Telemetry  
Center



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# Propulsion Anomaly

- Motors would repeatedly cut out momentarily, resulting in effectively ~50% thrust being delivered
- Cause has been traced to PixHawk's inability to deliver sufficient power to its output pins
  - PWM signal should be 0-3.3V, actual outputs are 0-2V when loaded
  - ESC receiving weak signal causes it to stop outputting briefly
- Preliminary troubleshooting has shown that placing Line Driver IC's on Pixhawk motor outputs removes voltage sag and results in stable motor response



# Servo Jitter

- Tail servos (primarily elevator servos) buzzed and jittered while powered up
  - Oscilloscope revealed signal from Pixhawk is clean; servos generated the noise
- Solution: program larger dead band into servos
  - Digital servos are highly programmable
  - Programming module ordered



# Flight Test - Summary

One test flight out of Plum Island Aerodrome (2B2):

- 20° Flap Takeoff
- 40° Flap Maneuvering
- Full Flap “Slow Flight”
- 0° Flap High Speed
- Full Flap Landing

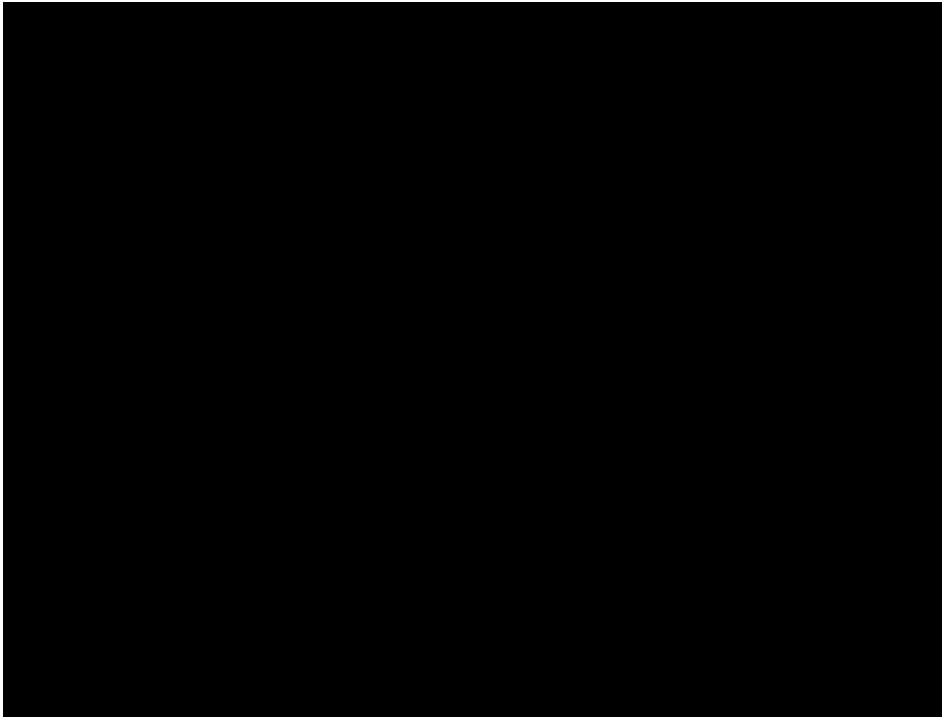
Again, we were operating under 50% power



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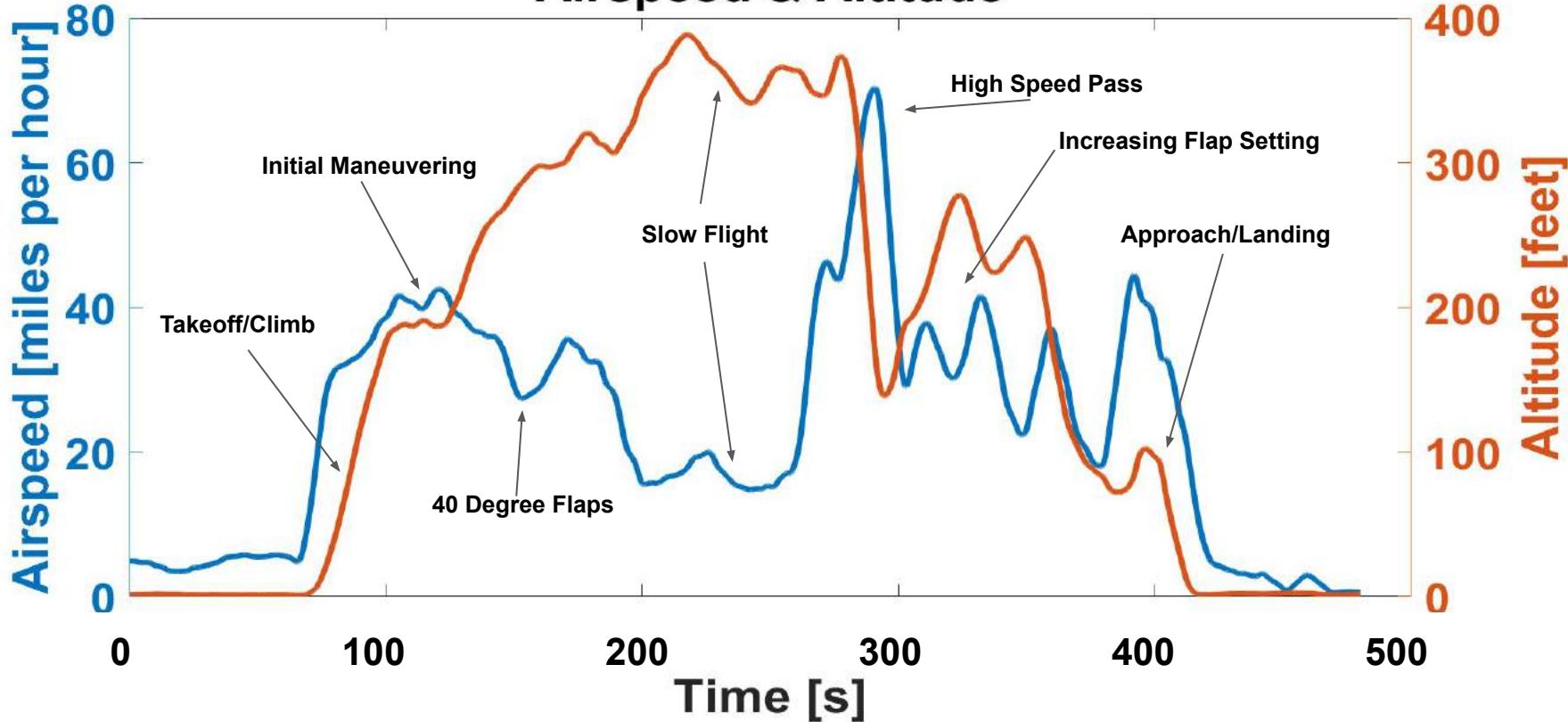
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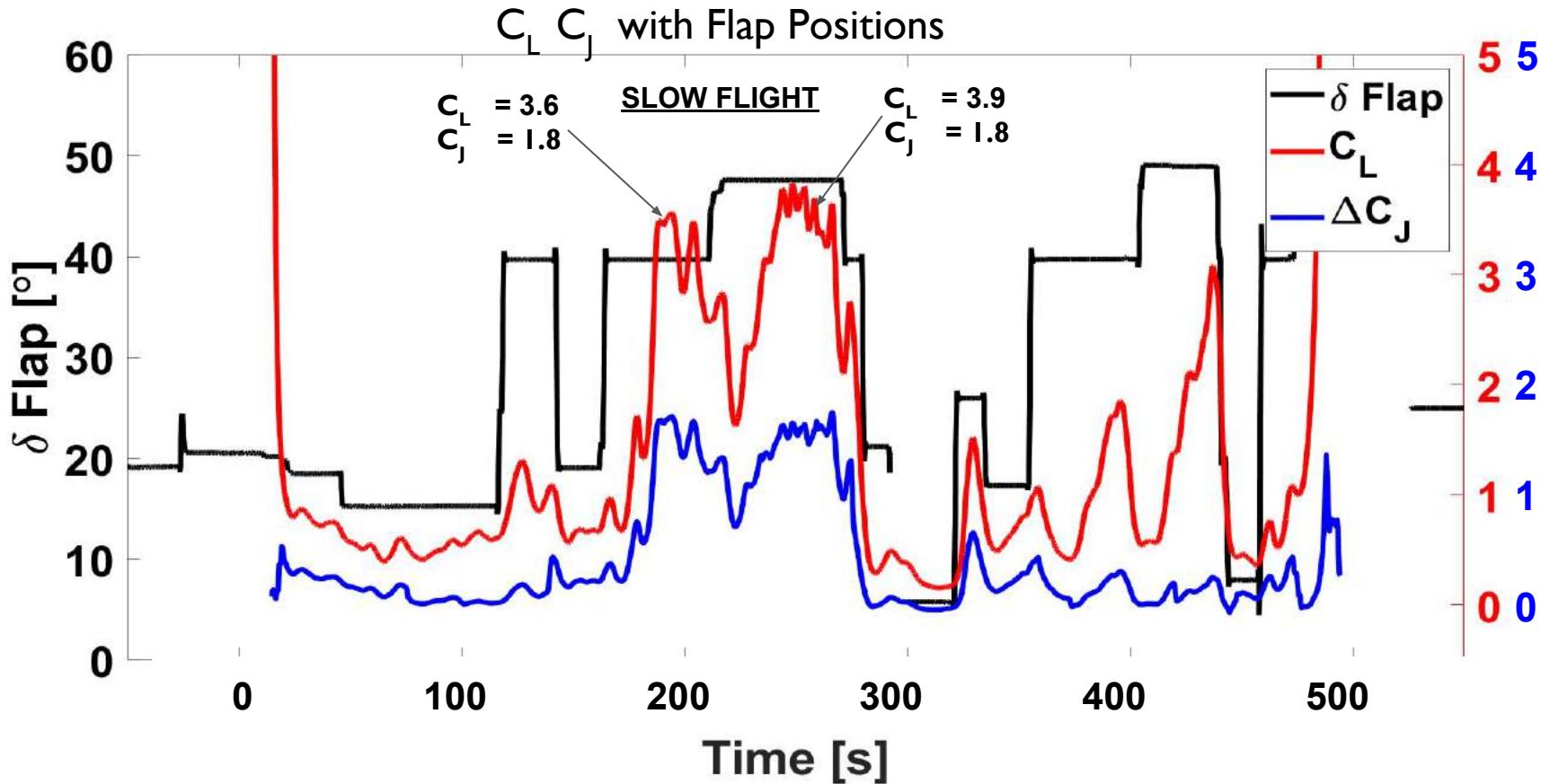
# Flight Test Video- Summary



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## Airspeed & Altitude

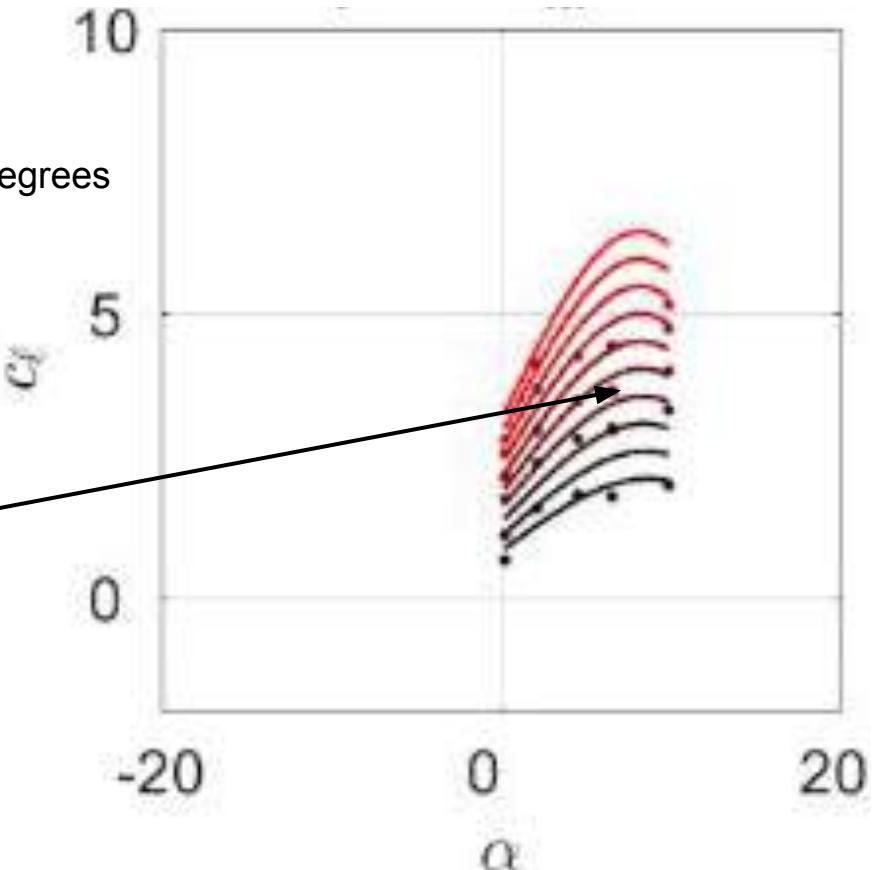




# High $C_L$ Performance Conclusions

Flap Deflection: 45 degrees

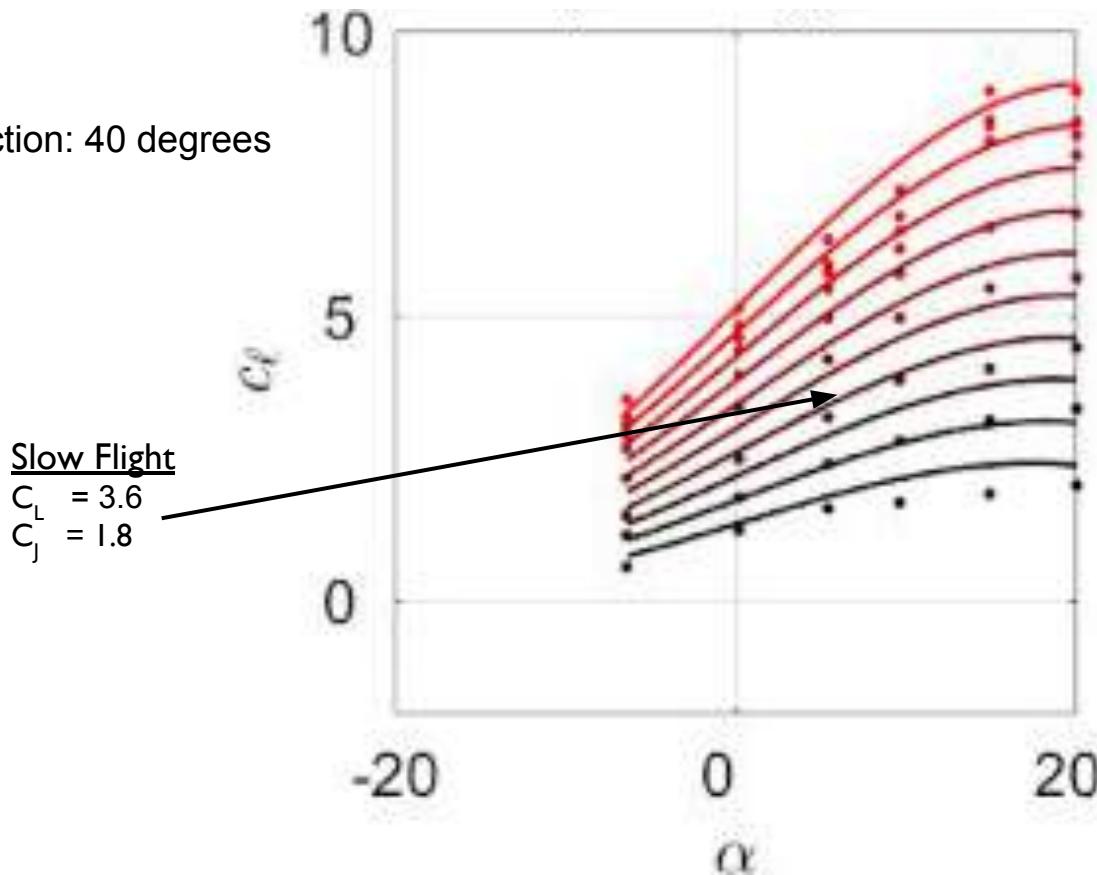
Slow Flight  
 $C_L = 3.9$   
 $C_J = 1.8$



- Matches data closely when angle of attack between  $5^\circ$  and  $10^\circ$ .
- 1 to 0.9 conversion from wind tunnel data to real world expected value.
- Once power issue resolved expect to move up the plot.

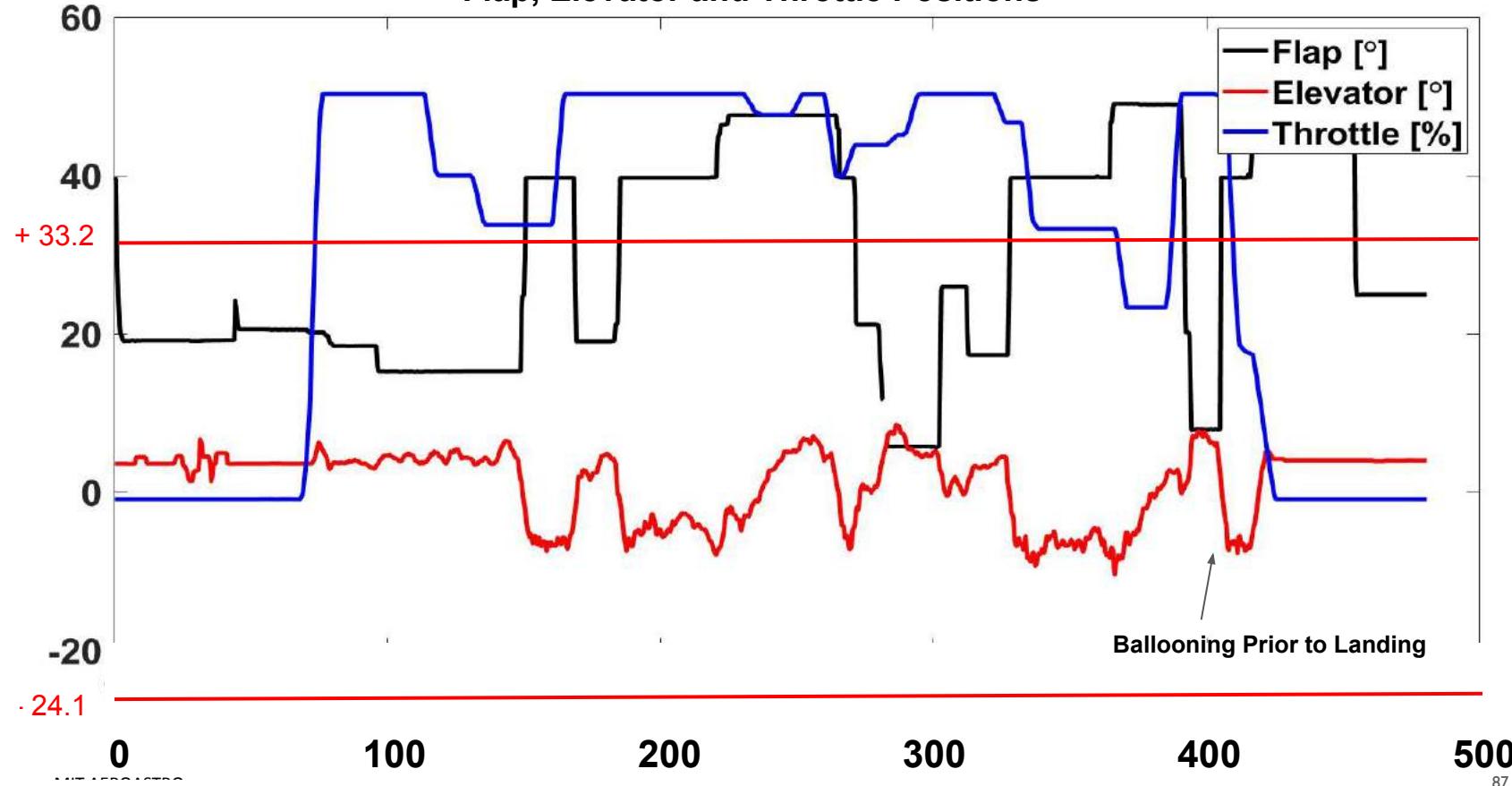
# High $C_L$ Performance Conclusions

Flap Deflection: 40 degrees



-Demonstrates correlation for 40 degree flap setting within reasonable angle of attack range.

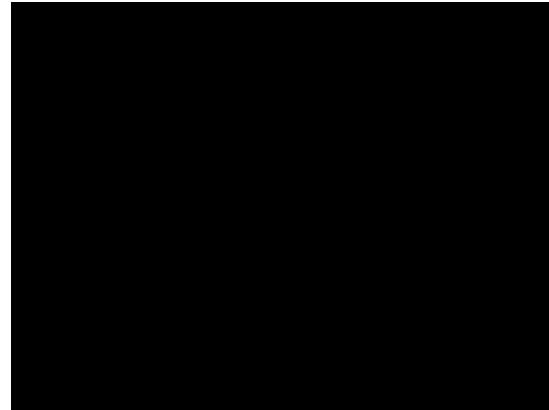
## Flap, Elevator and Throttle Positions

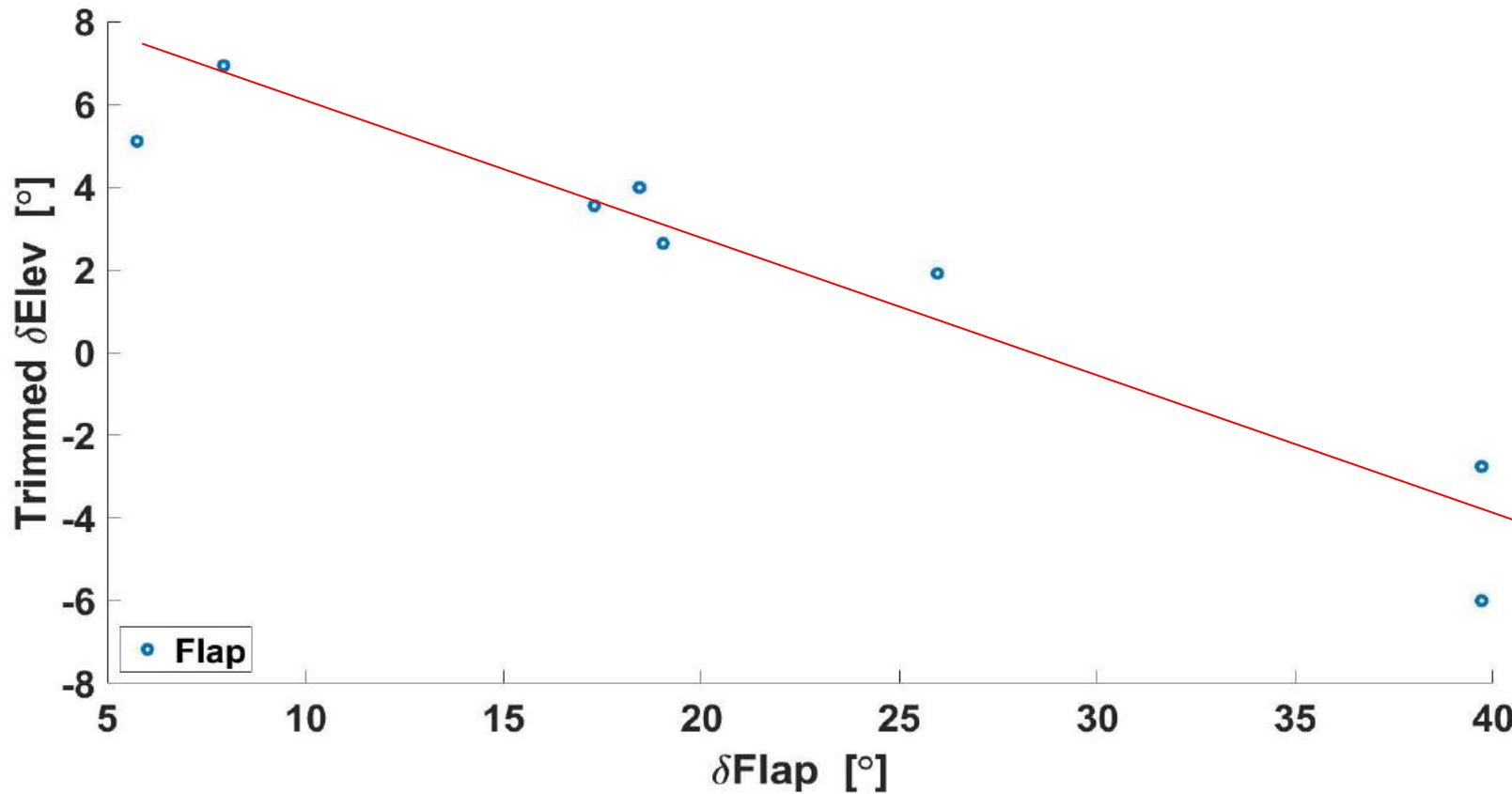


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# Tail Sizing Conclusions

- Demonstrated sufficient tail sizing for pitch control.
- 41% maximum required elevator for the entire flight.
- Largest elevator inputs occur during transitions to higher flap settings
- Can use servo information to mix elevator with flap deflection.





# Aircraft Controllability Assessment

	20° Flap Takeoff	40° Flap Maneuvering	Full Flap “Slow Flight”	0° Flap High Speed	Full Flap Landing
Cooper-Harper Rating	3	5	6	4	4
Cooper-Harper Description	Minimal pilot compensation required for desired performance	Adequate performance requires considerable pilot compensation	Adequate performance requires extensive pilot compensation	Desired performance required moderate pilot compensation	Desired performance required moderate pilot compensation



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# Aircraft Controllability Conclusions

- Qualitative analysis shows aircraft was controllable under all flight modes
- Pilot was able to perform all of the maneuvers attempted on first flight without loss of control
- Very positive for outcome under 100% during future testing



# Summary of Results From Flight Test

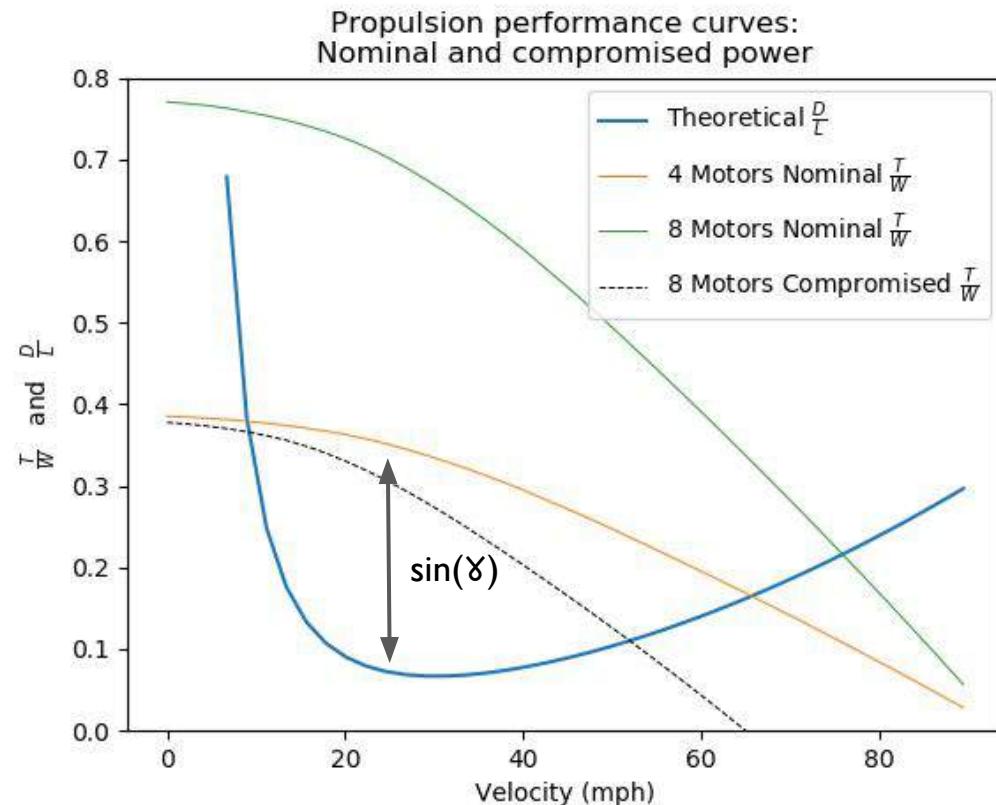
Addressed primary risks for POC vehicle: high  $C_L$  performance, sufficient tail sizing and controllability.

- Despite operating below 50% of max power, demonstrated a  $C_L$  of 3.9.
- Once Pixhawk motor output resolved, expecting to see even higher values.
- Demonstrated sufficient tail sizing.
- Never required more than 41% elevator deflection to control pitch.
- Can use servo information to mix elevator with flap deflection.
- Remained controllable throughout different flight regimes.



# Possible propulsive performance improvements

- T/W calculated from QPROP
  - Nominal and compromised power levels extrapolated from fish-scale thrust test
- D/L generated from drag-buildup and assuming steady-level flight
- Intersection of T/W and D/L curves = theoretical cruise speeds
- Significant climb angle,  $\gamma$ , improvements with power fix



# Key Design Risks and Current Assessment

	Risk	Assessment
LOW/ VALIDATED	Blown lift performance does not match prediction	Wind tunnel validated
MILD/ PARTIALLY VALIDATED	Tail Sizing Insufficient	Lack of full power during flight test prevented testing of tail size sufficiently
MEDIUM/ TO BE TESTED	Control difficulty near stall due to rapid pitching moment change	One stall maneuver was performed and control difficulty was fair, but lack of full power and oscillating motors prevent conclusion
HIGH	Excessive difficulty controlling approach glide slope	Unable to test due to lack of full power
	Insufficient low-speed lateral control	Oscillating motors affected pilot's ability to control at low-speeds
	Insufficient precision landing capability	Did not test during initial flight test



# The Path Forward

Aircraft modifications:

- Resolve servo jitter
- Stabilize motor signals

The Second Flight:

- Testing of tail size sufficiency under high flaps, high blowing, slow airspeed configuration
- Testing of control difficulty near full-power stall
- Testing controllability of approach glide slope
- Testing of lateral control with servo jitter removed
- Testing of precision landing capacity



# **Thank you!**

Professors Mark Drela and John Hansman

Communication Instructor Jennifer Craig

Teaching Assistants Chris Courtin and Jacquie Thomas

Aurora Flight Sciences

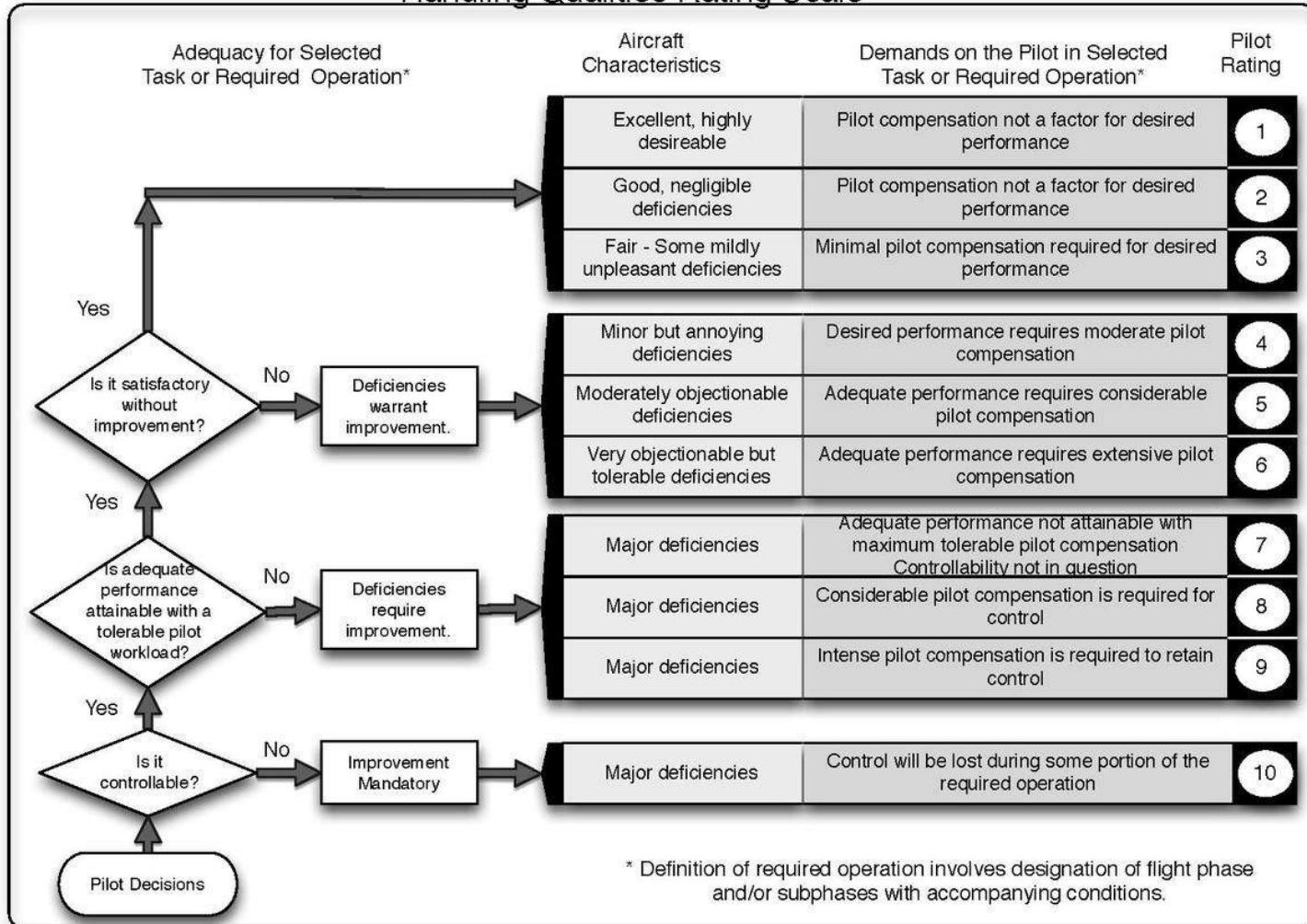


# Appendix



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# Handling Qualities Rating Scale

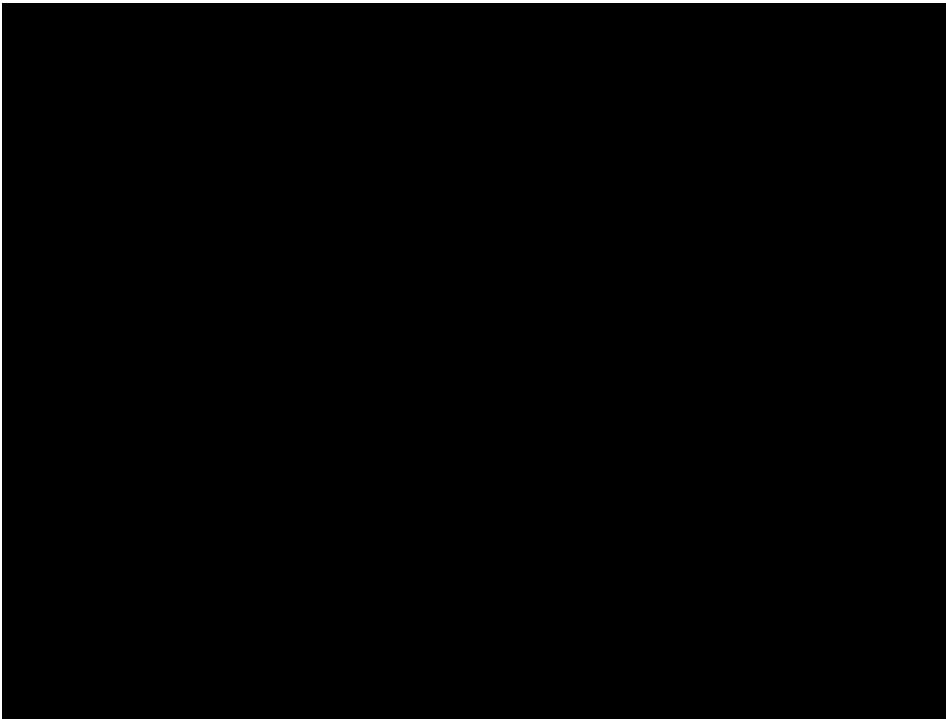


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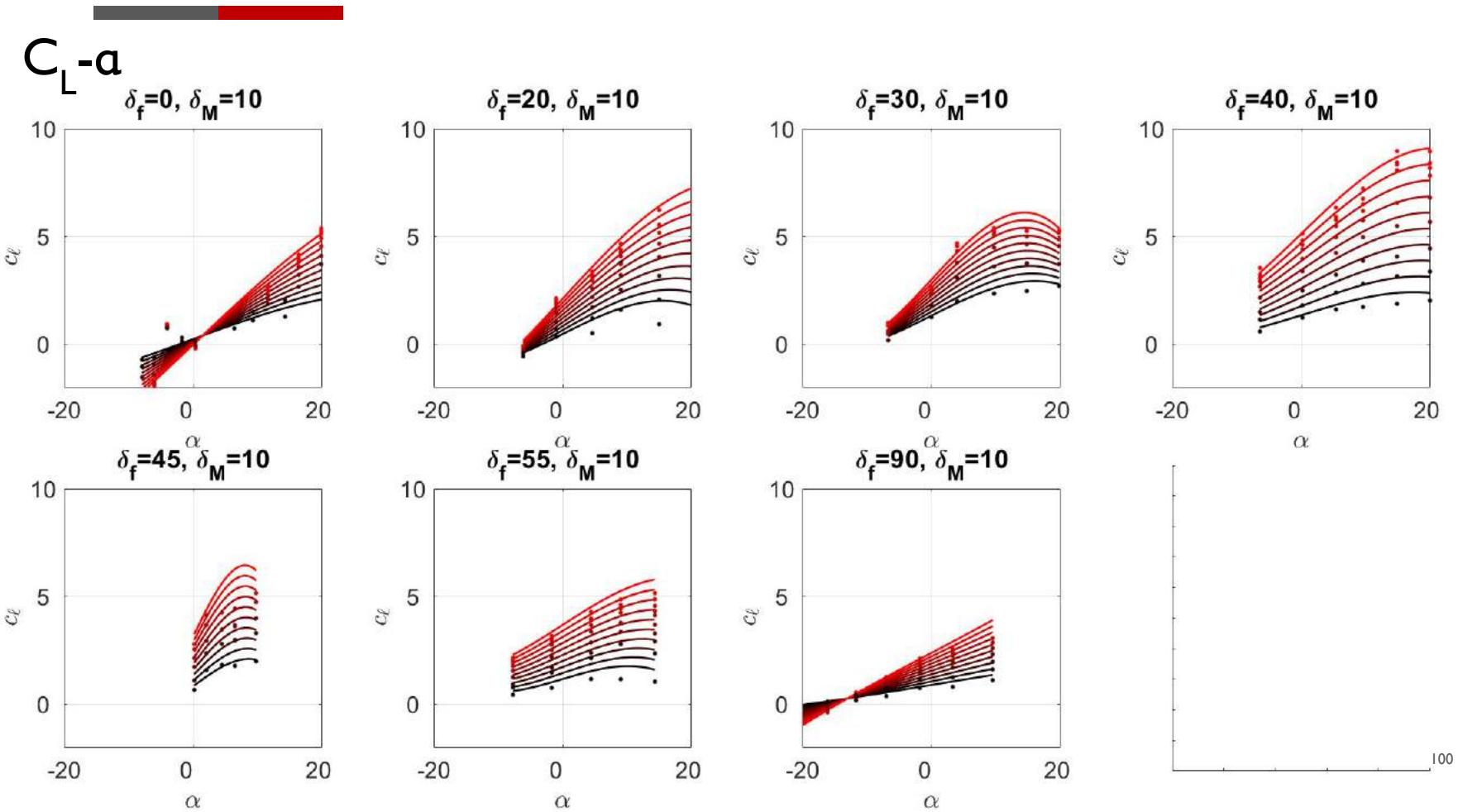
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# Post Flight Analysis



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$C_x - \alpha$

