

Hate sharing a plane? You'll love the flying scooter

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Name: The Airscooter. Age: Brand new. Appearance: Like an electric wasp. What is it, though? It's a personal flying machine. Like the hoverboard in *Back to the Future*? It's more of a tiny helicopter. Or, if you like, a really big drone. I'll take one. Don't you want to know more about it? No, I've been waiting for this all my life. Add it to my shopping cart. You'll have to wait a bit longer. The Airscooter is still in the planning stages. How far along is it? There's a 49-second video of it standing still. So I won't be flying one to work on Monday? No, but the Airscooter is the brainchild of Franky Zapata, the French inventor and jetski champion, who has a track record in personal aviation. What kind of track record? He invented the Flyboard Air, a jet platform on which he crossed the Channel in 2019. What was it powered by? Some sort of flux capacitor? No, kerosene. And the Airscooter? Present plans are for a hybrid engine powered by electricity and fuel, which will give it a flight time of up to two hours, a top speed of 62mph (100kph) and the carbon footprint of an ordinary car. Will it be easy to fly? It's controlled by two joysticks, a bit like a video game, and the idea is that you won't need a pilot's licence. Put me on the waiting list! There are no plans to sell Airscooters to the public yet. Instead, Zapata means to sell flight training "experiences" at a centre in Arizona. This isn't the first personal flying machine proposition, is it? Heavens, no. It's not even the first one called the Airscooter. Another company, AirScooter Corporation, was founded in Nevada in 2000 to make ultralight helicopters, but production never began. None of the other prototypes have taken off either? Not so far. I guess humans' dream of conquering the skies is destined to remain one tantalising step beyond reach. Um, yeah. But we do have planes. It's not the same if I have to sit next to someone. The problem is less the technology than the lack of infrastructure to support people flying about in their own personal bubbles. I don't care about infrastructure. You will when you need to land. Do say: "I'm ready to slip the surly bonds of Earth and be in Guildford by 3.30pm." Don't say: "Where are the free pretzels?"