

Thomas Stastny

Aerial-Robotics Controls Researcher

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Summary

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Aerial-robotics controls researcher with 8+ years experience in aerodynamic modeling, simulation, system identification, state estimation, control, planning, and flight-testing of fixed-wing, multi-copter, and hybrid vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

Grants: Authorship of **successful** research proposals with funding totaling **>1.8M USD**.

Publications: As of February 1, 2021, peer-reviewed publication count: **31**, h-index: **12**, citation count: **533** (source: [Google Scholar](#)).

Mentorship: Supervision of **4** Ph.D. students and **50+** M.Sc. and B.Sc. theses. Lecturer for 2 M.Sc. courses. TA for 2 B.Sc. courses.

Field experience: Organization/contributions of/to aerial-robotic field-campaigns in the Arctic, Antarctic, Brazilian Amazon, and Swiss/Italian Alps.

Education

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- 2014 - 2020 **ETH Zürich**, Zürich, Switzerland
Ph.D. in Robotics, supervised by Prof. Roland Siegwart in the *Autonomous Systems Lab*
Dissertation: *Low-Altitude Control and Local Re-Planning Strategies for Small Fixed-wing UAVs*
- 2012 - 2014 **University of Kansas**, Lawrence, KS, USA
M.Sc. in Aerospace Engineering (*with Honors*), GPA: 4.0/4.0
- 2012 **TU Delft**, Delft, Netherlands
Coursework in Systems & Control and Aerospace Engr. M.Sc. Programs
- 2008 - 2012 **University of Kansas**, Lawrence, KS, USA
B.Sc. in Aerospace Engineering, GPA: 3.7/4.0

Research Experience

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- Since 6/2020 **Autonomous Systems Lab (ASL), ETH Zürich** – Post-Doctoral Researcher
- Supervise and coordinate PhD and Masters student research activities related to measurement, aerodynamic modeling, system identification, and control of fixed-wing and hybrid, tilt-wing, VTOL UAVs, results including:
 - automatic tilt-wing control – video: https://youtu.be/pSXEnHUY2_4
 - stabilized deep stalled flight – video: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JpexWpThe5TOmXN1Og9uz9aQ5ysgh-m/view?usp=sharing>
 - Lead a team of PhD and Masters students on an (ongoing) project for autonomous, high-speed, aerial, vision-based payload recovery.
- 2014 - 2020 **Autonomous Systems Lab (ASL), ETH Zürich** – PhD Research Assistant
- Core researcher on EU search-and-rescue robotics projects *SHERPA* and *ICARUS*, organizing multiple university and industry partners in collaborative multi-robotic field demonstrations. <https://www.euronews.com/2016/05/23/dealing-with-danger-busy-geniuses-and-watchful-robots>
 - Interfaced with customers and industry partners within the ESA precision-farming project *SOLAR3* to deliver a reliable automatic, multi-hour endurance, surveying drone solution to non-expert end-users.
 - Developed and deployed efficient wind-aware guidance and control algorithms for fixed-wing, multi-copter, and VTOL tailsitter UAVs in extreme weather conditions safely stabilizing and preventing run-away of the aircraft. (see [Publications](#))
 - Developed and deployed Nonlinear Model Predictive Control (NMPC) algorithms for/on fixed-wing UAVs which mitigate actuator faults, prevent stall, exploit wind, and utilize vision-based terrain measurements for obstacle avoidance.
 - Conducted performance optimization and developed automatic take-off, landing, and cruise control design for the *AtlantikSolar* UAV, resulting in an **81.5 hour endurance world record** solar-powered flight for aircraft <50kg (2015) <http://www.atlantiksolar.ethz.ch/index.html%3Fp=670.html> and 26 hour, fully autonomous, search-and-rescue payload equipped flight (2016) <http://www.atlantiksolar.ethz.ch/index.html%3Fp=931.html>
- 2012 - 2014 **Center for Remote Sensing of Ice Sheets (CREGIS), University of Kansas** – Masters Research Assistant
- Conducted research on control and planning for fixed-wing UAVs including multi-agent avoidance and formation strategies.
 - Contributed to the design, integration, and **Antarctic deployment** of a polar-conditioned fixed-wing UAV with integrated dual-frequency ground-penetrating radar.

Skills

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- Programming** C++, Python, Matlab/Simulink
- Software** GNU Linux, Robotic Operating System (ROS), Git, Jenkins CI, Unigraphics NX (CAD)
- Hardware** 3D Prototyping, Radio controlled (RC) piloting of small fixed-wing aircraft and multi-copters

Field Projects (to top)

- **Supervised/Managed** student/engineering work on platform and payload development towards autonomous, beyond visual line-of-sight (BVLOS), drone-based deployment of GNSS monitoring stations on the **Gorner Glacier**, Switzerland. (2019) video: <https://youtu.be/1tvYj1aGEUc>
- Contributed regulatory documentation and flight-stack verification for the *first* networked (via industry partners Swisscom, INVOLI, and v2sky), BVLOS flight in Switzerland over Lake Neuchâtel. (2019) video: <https://youtu.be/ks-TiJP3dxs>
- **Organized/Lead** UAV operations in **Northwest Greenland** for a glacier monitoring field campaign, resulting in *first-ever* autonomous, BVLOS, solar-powered flights of a UAV in a polar region. (2017) website: <http://sun2ice.ethz.ch>, video: https://youtu.be/wyS6W1t_ryQ
- **Organized/Lead** field operations together with Swissnex Brazil and Brazilian Civil Aviation Authorities resulting in *first-ever* solar-powered flights of a UAV over the **Amazon rainforest** and the aerial monitoring/mapping of an oil spill on the Rio Pará.
- **8-week deployment** as mission planner and ground station operator for autonomous, BVLOS flights of a radar-integrated UAV in **Antarctica**, resulting in *first-ever* glacial bed-rock sounding via a UAV. (2014) <https://cresis.ku.edu/content/research/field-programs/antarctica#2013>

(Selected) Publications (to top)

A full list of publications may be found <https://scholar.google.ch/citations?user=R5Fs1A4AAAAJ&hl=en>, or is available upon request.

Optimization-Based Control:

- **T. Stastny** and R. Siegwart. “Nonlinear Model Predictive Guidance for Fixed-wing UAVs Using Identified Control Augmented Dynamics”. In: *International Conference on Unmanned Aircraft Systems (ICUAS)*. (2018).
- S. Verling, **T. Stastny**, G. Bättig, K. Alexis, and R. Siegwart. “Model-based Transition Optimization for a VTOL Tailsitter”. In: *IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA)*. (2017).

VTOL, Hybrid Platform Identification and Control:

- D. Rohr, **T. Stastny**, S. Verling, and R. Siegwart. “Attitude and Cruise Control of a VTOL Tiltwing UAV”. In: *IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters*. (2019). https://youtu.be/pSXEnHUY2_4
- C. Olsson, S. Verling, **T. Stastny**, and R. Siegwart. “Full Envelope System Identification of a VTOL Tailsitter UAV”. In: *AIAA Guidance, Navigation, and Control (GNC) Conference*. (2021).
- S. Fuhrer, S. Verling, **T. Stastny**, and R. Siegwart. “Fault-tolerant Flight Control of a VTOL Tailsitter UAV”. In: *IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA)*. (2019).

Disturbance Modeling and Rejection:

- **T. Stastny** and R. Siegwart. “On Flying Backwards: Preventing Run-away of Small, Low-speed, Fixed-wing UAVs in Strong Winds”. In: *IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS)*. (2019). <https://youtu.be/oM690LO29kM>
- D. Hentzen, **T. Stastny**, R. Siegwart, and R. Brockers. “Disturbance Estimation and Rejection for High-Precision Multirotor Position Control”. In: *IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS)*. (2019). <https://youtu.be/-1PvZ5YBluw>
- Y. Demitri, S. Verling, **T. Stastny**, A. Melzer, and R. Siegwart. “Model-based Wind Estimation for a Hovering VTOL Tailsitter UAV”. In: *IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA)*. (2017).

Long-term Flight Autonomy:

- P. Oettershagen, **T. Stastny**, T. Hinzmann, K. Rudin, T. Mantel, A. Melzer, B. Wawrzacz, G. Hitz, and R. Siegwart. “Robotic Technologies for Solar-powered UAVs: Fully Autonomous Updraft-aware Aerial Sensing for Multiday Search-and-rescue Missions”. In: *Journal of Field Robotics (JFR)*. (2018). <https://youtu.be/8m76Mx9m2nM>

Mentorship & Teaching (to top)

- **Supervised** 2 PhD Students (ongoing), 24 Masters Theses, 18 Masters Semester Theses, and 14 Bachelor Theses at ETH Zürich. (2014 – Present)
- **Coached** 3 ETH Zürich Focus Projects – teams of 8-12 B.Sc. students who develop a robotic product from A to Z:
 - *Dipper* – a flying, diving, swimming, and re-emerging, swept-wing UAV. video: https://youtu.be/q_9tSHTW1xE
 - *ftero* – a VTOL UAV for airborne wind energy (year 1 and 2)
 - *VertiGo* – a wall-riding robot. Resulted in a patent. video: <https://youtu.be/KRYT2kYbgo4>
- **Co-Lecturer** for ETH Zürich M.Sc. course “Robot Dynamics” (2015-Present).
- **Guest Lecturer** for University of Kansas Aerospace M.Sc. course “Optimal Control” (2013).
- **Teaching assistant** for University of Kansas B.Sc. courses “Introductory Topics in Mathematics” and “Elementary Statistics”. (2010 – 2012)

Awards (to top)

- **O. Hugo Schuck Best Paper Award** (2018) for American Control Conference (ACC) paper: “Gone with the wind: Nonlinear Guidance for Small Fixed-wing Aircraft in Arbitrarily Strong Windfields”. <http://a2c2.org/awards/o-hugo-schuck-best-paper-award>

- **United States Department of Defense Antarctica Service Medal** (2014)
- **University of Kansas Aerospace Undergraduate Researcher Award** (2012)