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Aurora's Centaur, shown here in a test flight near Manassas Virginia, can be flown in either a manned mode, an unmanned mode, or a hybrid flight mode.



Aurora and armasuisse sign Centaur OPA contract. L-R: John Langford (Aurora President & CEO), Peter Winter (Dir. of Aeronautical Systems, armasuisse), Ambassador Don Beyer (holding picture), Roland Ledermann (armasuisse PM for Unmanned Aircraft Systems (and Centaur)).

Swiss Department of Defence Becomes Centaur Launch Customer

Manassas, VA, January 25, 2012 – Aurora Flight Sciences announced today that the Swiss Department of Defence has become the first customer for the Centaur Optionally-Piloted Aircraft (OPA).

armasuisse, an official procurement agency of the Swiss Department of Defence with its own Flight Test Center, will use the Centaur as a flying test bed for new sensors and Sense & Avoid equipment required to operate Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) in the entire National Air Space (NAS). The aircraft will be based in Emmen, Switzerland, operated by armasuisse only and will not become an operational System of the Swiss Air Force.

Switzerland is a European leader in unmanned aircraft operations in their complex and dense airspace. The Swiss Air Force has been operating UAS for more than 10 years in the NAS, during day time operations with a chase plane in non-segregated airspace and during night time operations without a chase plane.

With unprecedented flexibility of operation, Centaur is a new type of aircraft that can be flown in three ways. First, it can be piloted like a normal general aviation aircraft, retaining its FAA certification and the full functionality of its Garmin G-1000 flight management system. In less than four hours, it can be converted to an unmanned aircraft, using a completely separate UAV control system installed where the copilot normally sits. Finally, it can be flown in a hybrid mode, operated as a UAV but with a crew onboard. The crew can control the aircraft using an onboard control station, operate payloads and perform experiments, interact with air traffic controllers, and serve as a safety observer. The human pilot can override the robotic flight control system at any time, with both electronic and mechanical override options.

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Economical and a good neighbor, Centaur is a four-place, twin-engine aircraft that is both exceptionally efficient and extremely quiet. Centaur burns less than 40 pounds of jet fuel per hour, and can stay airborne for up to a day at a time. It has extensive noise suppression, making the aircraft virtually undetectable at altitudes more than 3000 feet above the ground.

“Reliability, safety, efficiency, and low noise are essential features of Centaur,” said armasuisse program manager Roland Ledermann. “This hybrid aircraft is uniquely suited to the needs of customers who seek the advantages of a remotely piloted aircraft but must also operate in crowded skies.”

Aurora’s industry team for Centaur includes Diamond Aircraft, Rockwell Collins, and Textron/AAI. Development of Centaur began in 2009. Test flights began in 2010, with the first fully automatic takeoffs and landings starting in 2011. The first production Centaur is scheduled for delivery to Switzerland in 2012.

About Aurora Flight Sciences

Aurora Flight Sciences designs and builds robotic aircraft and other advanced aerospace vehicles for scientific and military applications. Aurora is headquartered in Manassas, VA and operates production plants in Bridgeport, WV and Columbus, MS and a Research and Development Center in Cambridge, MA. To view recent press releases and more about Aurora please visit our web site at www.aurora.aero.

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