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Aurora Flight Sciences' Centaur

Aurora Flight Sciences Conducts Flight Tests for CENTAUR Optionally Piloted Aircraft

Manassas, VA, July 14, 2010 – Aurora Flight Sciences has started flight testing for a new version of aircraft. By combining Aurora's experience in aeronautical engineering, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), advanced payload engineering, and a previous Optionally Piloted Aircraft (OPA) prototype, Aurora is bringing its Centaur OPA to the market. Centaur is based on the highly successful Diamond 42M general aviation aircraft. The combination of advanced avionics, efficient diesel engines and fully composite structure make the DA-42M the ideal platform for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) flights. Centaur is able to support many commercial and military electro-optical and communication payloads in its Universal Nose Pod and Belly Pod modifications.

Most ISR flights are presently conducted by older aircraft with flight crews or by unmanned aircraft systems (UASs). The UAS is typically used when the flight mission is too hazardous for humans. Operating a UAS in the controlled airspace of most countries presents significant challenges, however. US airspace restricts unmanned operations to very limited time and space constraints that are presently reserved for defense applications. The UAS has to be ferried to its deployment site on board other aircraft or ground vehicles. This greatly increases cost and reduces the logistical benefit of the UAS.

Aurora's Centaur offers the best of both worlds: a relatively low-cost, reliable general aviation ISR aircraft that can be converted for unmanned flight in as little as four hours. This Optionally Piloted Aircraft (OPA) is a new concept in terms of engineering, operation and certification. Aurora started its flight testing process for the Centaur OPA this week. Flight tests will initially collect engineering data for the flight control system (FCS) and vehicle management system (VMS), transition into unmanned operations with a safety pilot and ultimately operate fully unmanned. Centaur's OPA kit will allow operators to fly like any normal aircraft for missions or repositioning, and convert it to an unmanned mode on site – essentially exit the aircraft, change its mode, operate it from a laptop control station unmanned, and reverse the process once the mission is complete.

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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