

Sikorsky's X2 copter may suit Army's need for speed

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A mockup of Sikorsky's X2 Technology Light Tactical Helicopter offers technology that enables aircraft to fly at higher speeds with counter-rotating main rotors on top and an auxiliary propeller at the back. (contributed photo)

With the U.S. Army preparing specifications for a new fleet of armed reconnaissance helicopters, Stratford-based Sikorsky Aircraft has unveiled a possible contender for the contract -- the first military design incorporating its X2 technology

This week at the Nashville Army Aviation Association of America annual convention, Sikorsky unveiled a mockup of a new military design featuring the distinctive X2 technology, which has counter-rotating main rotors on top and an auxiliary propeller at the back for added speed.

The unveiling of what the company calls the Light

Tactical Helicopter prompted speculation from one analyst that this could be Sikorsky's offering for an Army reconnaissance helicopter, though the company says its mockup is not an offering for any particular contract.

The Army pulled Bell Helicopters' \$6.2 billion, 512-aircraft contract for reconnaissance helicopters in October, citing cost overruns. That could open the door for Sikorsky and other helicopter makers to grab a revised order, according to Ray Jaworowski, senior analyst with Newtown-based Forecast International.

But timing might be the biggest problem facing Sikorsky for this contract, he said.

Jaworowski said Sikorsky can make the X2 military version available by 2017 or 2018, but if the Army wants the helicopter sooner than it could mean the X2 would be out of the running, or would get a smaller piece of the contract at a later date.

Sikorsky started to develop the X2 in June 2005 and achieved its first flight in August.

"The hope is that the Army will wait for it," Jaworowski said.

One reason Sikorsky has a shot at getting a little patience from the Army is how fast the X2 could be.

"The big thing the Army is looking for in all its rotorcraft programs is speed," Jaworowski said. Sikorsky estimates the helicopter will hit a cruising speed of 250 knots, or 287 miles per hour. The X2 also incorporates a variety of new technologies to make the control system simpler, reduce drag and provide better

vibration control.

"These technologies can potentially bring new rotorcraft capabilities that, to date, have been unachievable by the industry," Sikorsky President Jeffrey Pino said. "In addition to doubling the speed of helicopters, this technology can improve hot/high performance, maneuverability and low acoustic signature."

The potential contract also could hold more significance for Sikorsky.

According to Bell's Web site, it was awarded the ARH-70 contract in 2005 in part to replace the Army's aging fleet of Bell-made Kiowa Warriors and "fill a void created by the 2004 cancellation of the RAH-66 Comanche program."

Sikorsky was building the Comanche in Bridgeport when the contract was canceled. Jaworowski still maintains Comanche was one of the most advanced helicopters ever built.

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