

Sikorsky launching new helicopter line

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Published 07:46 p.m., Friday, July 15, 2011



A mock up of what Sikorsky Aircraft expects its S-97 Raider to look like. It is the new hybrid helicopter, the company is building after successful tests of an experimental aircraft that uses similar technology, the X2.

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Sikorsky Aircraft launched its new hybrid helicopter line, the S-97 Raider, this week, creating what could generate the future lines of all its helicopters, one analyst said.

The launch of the S-97 follows the final flight of an experimental aircraft, the X2, in Florida on Thursday, which management credited for paving the way for the new line.

"The X2 program also has helped to develop the next generation of Sikorsky engineers, including some who are now in key positions on the S-97 Raider program..." Sikorsky President Jeffrey Pino said in a news release. "Today, the entire Sikorsky workforce

stands proud of this accomplishment and what it means for the future of rotorcraft aviation."

What it could mean is a change in how helicopters look and how fast they are.

The X2, a distinctive looking helicopter with two overhead rotors and a pusher prop in the rear, flew 23 times and hit a top speed of 253 knots, or 291 miles per hour. The \$50 million program was funded and developed over a six-year period solely by the company.

Sikorsky intends on transferring X2 technology to the S-97. Efforts right now are centered on design and engineering in Stratford, according to the company. And the company is bringing in partners on the development of the S-97.

Sikorsky spokesman Paul Jackson said the company is selecting those partners now and will fund 75 percent of the program.

Shares of Sikorsky's parent company, United Technologies Corp., climbed 50 cents to close at \$88.32 in Friday trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Ray Jaworowski, senior aerospace analyst at Newtown-based Forecast International, said this is an important program for Sikorsky, especially after several speeches by Pino.

"You can imply that the X2 could be the foundation for the next generation of Sikorsky helicopters," Jaworowski said.

He was quick to add, the conventional helicopter, with one overhead rotor and a stabilizing rear rotor, will continue to be produced for years to come. But if this program proves successful, the era of the hybrid could be taking off, he said.

And if it does take off, it will be with soldiers aboard, he said, because the civilian market is more concerned about fuel efficiency and maintenance costs rather than speed, which is a top military need.

In a news release, Sikorsky Vice President of Research & Engineering Mark Miller said the S-97 Raider program will design, build and fly two prototype light tactical helicopters to enable the U.S. military to evaluate the viability of a fast and maneuverable next-generation rotorcraft for a variety of combat missions. The aircraft will have six-passenger cabins and the ability to carry armaments.

"In addition to the superior speed and maneuverability of X2 technology, these aircraft are designed to be capable of 10,000-foot hover out of ground effect on a 95-degree day," Miller said. "The future awaits this technology, and today we can say that we see it on the horizon."

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<http://www.ctpost.com/news/article/Sikorsky-launching-new-helicopter-line-1468433.php#ixzz1SSt7Rw2C>