MERLIN PROGRESSES FLIGHT TEST CAMPAIGN OF CERTIFICATION-READY AIRCRAFT

News / Manufacturer



Merlin is rapidly progressing the flight test campaign of its certification-ready Cessna Caravan. Conducted at Quonset State Airport in Rhode Island, the ongoing flight tests highlight the technical maturation of the Merlin Pilot system, validating its ability to meet the autonomy requirements of fixed-wing platforms—including the C-130J and KC-135 to support Merlin's ongoing military partnerships. Recent flight tests validated core system functionality, such as Flight Guidance and Autothrottle, which help the aircraft maintain its desired flight path as well as automatically manage engine thrust to maintain a target airspeed, setting the stage for more complex and intelligent flight autonomy.

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Merlin kicked off the flight test campaign of its certification-ready autonomy platform in June 2024 when the aircraft underwent a platform integration and systems-on test flight with the Merlin Pilot and a human safety pilot aboard. Ongoing flight tests continue to validate the progression of the Merlin Pilot system, including core system functionalities such as Flight Guidance and Autothrottle. Flight Guidance integrates with aircraft systems to manage trajectory and speed across all flight phases, providing precise lateral and vertical guidance while reducing pilot workload. Autothrottle automatically adjusts engine thrust to maintain target airspeeds across all flight phases, working with the Flight Guidance capability to ensure smooth, efficient, and consistent speed control.

Matt George, CEO and founder, Merlin commented: “Kicking off our flight test campaign last year marked our transition from R&D to STC validation and certification. As we continue testing and integrating additional core functionalities of our high-assurance autonomy platform, we’re proving our ability to build and deliver a highly assured system capable of operating in real-world operations—including complex military missions. These milestones are an exciting step forward in fulfilling our mission to deliver safe, autonomous flight—beginning with our first phase of safety-critical crew support.”

Other recent milestones that have progressed the validation, and eventual certification, of the Merlin Pilot system include the Federal Aviation Administration approving Merlin’s custom Remote Data Concentrator (RDC), as well as the United States Air Force (USAF) accepting Merlin’s airworthiness plan for KC-135 testing.

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