

# Flying Cars: Necessity or Entertainment?

## Essay

The idea of flying cars is not new. It can be traced back to the early twentieth century, when the Wright Brother first discovered the aircraft and people realised that they could fly, ever since they have been chasing the dream of a flying cars. Flying cars, also known as road able aircrafts, is an airplane which would not necessarily be drivable on the roads but also in the airspace. Several different efforts have been made to sum the merits of a vertical takeoff and landing craft with that of a high-speed and responsive craft. Even in the eightieth century there was an effort to build a gliding horse cart, which, however did not succeed. In United States Patent and Trademark Office, there are almost eighty patents that have been filed for the several forms of flying cars. Some of these have in reality taken off, but many did or have not.

Early experiments of the flying car can be traced back in the 1910s, a decade after the Wright Brothers' first flight. The first functioning (although still argued) road able aircraft, called the Curtiss Auto plane, was developed in 1917 by Glenn Curtiss, who is considered the father of the flying car. It was a small plane with three wings, which spanned about twenty seven feet and could carry a load of 710 pounds and used the vehicle's motor to drive a four-bladed propeller attached at the back of the vehicle. At that time, the thought of a car with wings was an exciting advancement, and Curtiss had a dream of making it the best personal mode transport of everyone who could pay a price for it. However, the Aerobile never actually took off though it made a few hops (Duller, 1982).

In 1933, the U.S. Air Commerce Bureau made a call to airplane makers to develop an airplane model, which could be sold for lesser than US\$700. The Flivver competition, as it was known, managed to produce several flying car models, among them was the Aerobile developed Waldo Waterman, who was a naval aviator on North Island, San Diego Bay. The funny-looking three wheeled vehicle performed better than a vehicle and then its predecessor, with a typical 100-horsepower Studebaker engine motor below the top, steering wheel in the cockpit and propeller at the back car. Unfortunately, since it was initiated at the time of the Great Depression, the Aerobile was met with many challenges, although it could take off, it never wedged on. Nevertheless, Waterman worked on and improved the model, but it never got flight certifications. (Anufriyev, 2008)

In the 1946, Robert Fulton built the Airphibian basing his idea on adapting a plane for the road rather than adapting a car for flying. The plane could be easily converted to a car by removing the wings and tail hood of the plane to fit on the road and the propellers could be kept in the craft's fuselage. The Airphibian was the first flying car to get a certification by the Civil Aviation Authority, the antecedent of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). It featured a 150 hp, six-cylinder engine, lightweight fibreglass body, four passenger seats, four removable wings and tail

and flew at 120 mph and drive at 50 mph. Although the model was the best then, the maker was faced with financial constraints and some technicalities.

Then in 1947 Consolidated-Vultee built the Convaircar that was featured with a detachable airplane unit, lightweight fiberglass shell and could accommodate four people. The flying car offered one hour of flight and a gas mileage of 45 miles/gallon.

In 1949, Molt Taylor, inspired by the Airphibian and Robert Fulton, designed the Aerocar perhaps the most famous road able aircraft car. The Aerocar was designed to drive, fly and then drive again with consistency. The car had a fibreglass body, a 3-meter-long drive shaft connected with the engine to the propellers. It cruised at 120 m/h in the air and was the second and last flying car to get the FAA's certification. In fact in 1970, Ford Motor Co. made efforts to market the car but its plans were disrupted by the then looming oil crises.

Ever since several models have been put to test including the Advanced Vehicle Engineers (AVE) Mizar, The Moller Skycar, with the latest one being the Terrafugia Transition. The Terrafugia is featured with a two seating capacity and folding wings. The makers plan to release its batch in the market by 2011. Although, these pioneers did not actually manage to build a viable road able aircraft, and some even died testing their ideas, they showed to the world that a vehicle could be developed to fly and enthused a new group of flying car enthusiasts. "With advances in lightweight material, computer modelling and computer-aided airplane, the dream is almost realised".

### **Advantages of technology development**

More developments have been done in areas of technology fields whereby machines have been developed that are used to assist humans. The discovery of airplanes brought a great impact in the transport industry as the stake holders were able to define the best mechanisms of dealing with different transport issues that arose as time went by. As a result of technology, mass aircraft-car production was experienced as aircraft-car production machines were automated meaning limited time would be used to come up with high production. This high production translated to faster economic growth and made a country more stable economically. It is this that led European countries and the USA to start rivaling one another as a way of trying to be seen in the face of the whole world as being more developed than the other.

In addition computers have made transport gadgets more convenient with the incorporation of the internet and other sophisticated communication gadgets. A bulk of information is loaded into a computer and compressed into a smaller unit then stored where it can be retrieved easily for use at a convenient time. More so they are used in programming by various transportation programmes making it easier to follow an outlined series of events without the need of manual guidance. Communication gadgets also have reduced communication distance between different transport agencies as one can deliver a message to a distance person within a very short period of time. (Bourne, 1995)

Vehicle- aircrafts and other automobile machines have made transport faster and the same time saving time and energy that would have been used while travelling by road. The development of e-learning has improved the system of education greatly as learners grow to have the skills and experience on how to use the flying car while incorporating modern technology and at the same time relieving them the burden of carrying books. As a result, globalization is being encouraged worldwide for all countries to be members in the project, and the main driving force behind the achievement of this goal is technology. This sees the entire nation working together on the economic market to improve their transportation sector.

### **Disadvantages of technology development**

As much as it holds credit in the lives of many people, technology has had a great negative impact. The most outstanding of all this is the resulting of unemployment to many people as machines have taken over what used to be done by humans leaving them jobless. This has contributed to a rise in poverty as only few people who are experienced are the ones able to secure employment to work with the machines. Another thing to note is the increase in mortality as a result of accidents from the automobile machines; also some people have been reported to have lost their lives in factories while working with the flying car project. Global warming is as a result of technology as emissions which are harmful to environment are released into the ecosystem untreated.

In addition, long exposure to the radioactive materials or fossil fuels used in the manufacture of the automobiles when not well regulated has led to eye problems which are long term. Maintenance of the automobiles machines and all other machines are very expensive thereby placing a financial burden on people when they break down.

In conclusion road able aircrafts is an idea whose time has come, it may have been little more of a dream for the past century, things may be turning around, which will see the invention to be realised. Being a technological advancement like no other, there are pros and cons, but it is evident that they are more of an advantage and efforts should be made to see the idea come to pass. The main challenges to road able aircrafts have technically been the weight of the materials, the controllability, and the lack of infrastructure to sustain the many vehicles flying around (Franklin)

Because of new, lighter, stronger materials, the challenges about weight have been greatly reduced. And because of computer modelling and computer-aided systems that can automate a large part of the flight, that challenge has been addressed. However, infrastructure has not been put in place which can sustain everyone to fly rather than drive. For now, treating flying cars as aircrafts which can also be driven may seem to be the way out. Pilots will still require a license to drive them, and the cars will have to be subjected to the same FAA considerations as small aircrafts.

## Reference List

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