

Why flying cars may not be plane crazy

As we hit the middle of 2018, we can safely say that the idea of jetting around in a flying car is not such a crazy notion. The development of technology on many fronts - from nanotechnology to autonomous driving - means that reasonably priced flying cars are likely to be a commercial reality in as little as the next five to ten years.

Flying cars are not a new idea

But before we get to that, let's take a step back though and look at where this idea began.

Oddly enough, the concept of a flying vehicle predates cars. In the 18th Century a French inventor, [Jean Marie Le Bris](#), decided to turn his horse drawn cart into a gliding vehicle. It sported a 50-foot wing span and required a downhill slope to get off the ground. It also very nearly killed Le Bris on its first and only flight. While it kind of worked, you probably won't be shocked to learn that the "[Artificial Albatross](#)" was *not* a commercial success.

Flash forward to the 1970s. A number of inventors had tried and failed to develop a safe, reliable car plane since Jean Marie's doomed albatross, but this did not deter inventor and entrepreneur, Henry Smolinski.

[Henry had a bright idea](#). Instead of constructing a commercially successful flying plane from scratch, he decided it'd be far more efficient to chop the wings of a Cessna plane and simply attach them to a trusty Ford Pinto. What could go wrong? Unfortunately, quite a bit as it turns out. The wings had a nasty habit of falling off,

which is far from ideal when you're sitting in a Ford Pinto several thousand feet above the surface of the earth. Smolinski and his business partner died and the dream of that awesome flying car died with them.

Where are we today?

You'd think after these early failures, humans might consign flying cars to the "too hard" basket. But we're a stubborn species! Fifty years later, thanks to better automotive technologies and enhanced methods of aviation, the possibility of flying cars is back on the table.

In March 2018, Dutch automotive technologies firm [PAL-V](#) unveiled the world's first commercially manufactured flying car. It's called the Liberty Pioneer and it has to be said, it's a beautifully sleek piece of engineering. With its narrowed front and swept back cockpit style cabin, it genuinely looks like a hybrid between a car and a plane. It's a far cry from a Ford Pinto with a couple of wings bolted to the roof! [Take a look for yourself](#). It hits the market in early 2019, so if you have a spare \$620,000 lying around, now would be a good time to get excited.

While it's undeniable we've made leaps and bounds thanks to the latest technology in cars and a whole lot of nerdy knowhow, there are still obstacles to overcome.

First of all, the Liberty Pioneer is very much the exception to the rule as a vehicle that can be licensed to handle both public roads and air travel. The majority of vehicles classified as "flying cars" are more like passenger drones. Kitty Hawks' recently released "[Flyer](#)" is a perfect example. It has a flight time of roughly 20 minutes and it's strictly intended for use over water. It's great fun and very nifty, but it's hardly the ubiquitous sky and road hybrid we dream of.

Then there's the safety dimension to consider. While the Liberty Pioneer achieves [the amazing feat](#) of being both road safety regulations compliant and certified by the European Safety Agency, you'll still need to get a pilot's license to use this

thing. While that's not an insurmountable barrier to overcome if you long to soar above the clouds, it does beg the question of how many people are willing to log the hours necessary to become a qualified pilot.

But don't despair! In the next few years, flying car automotive technologies are going to get really interesting.

When will we have flying cars?

We're close. We're really close!

While the Liberty Pioneer is still a niche item for the most adventurous and wealthy among us, there are a few emergent technologies which look likely to place flying cars within reach in the next five to ten years. Consider what we're seeing in the latest technology in cars:

To begin with, autonomous driving technology has made leaps and bounds. At the current rate of development it's very reasonable to assume that autonomous driving technology will extend to the air. Sounds far-fetched? Bear in mind that Uber's goal is to provide autonomous flying vehicles as a "[mainstream service](#)" by 2023.

Then there's the huge safety enhancement you get from connected cars. We're seeing that cars which can communicate their position to one another are [significantly safer](#).

Finally, we have to factor in the continuous development of technology we're seeing in all kinds of supporting sciences. [Nanotechnology](#) is delivering lighter and stronger materials. [Neurotechnology](#) shows promise in revolutionizing driver interfaces. Battery and [passenger drone technologies](#) are introducing new mechanisms for flight.

All these innovations combined suggest that not only is the idea of a flying car not crazy, it's actually something very much within our collective grasp. When will we

have flying cars? Not tomorrow but it's safe to say it's just around the corner.

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