

Ten flying cars which prove that humans are equal parts stupid and brilliant

For close to two hundred years, humans have been obsessed with making a vehicle which works equally well on the ground and in the air. We've failed at it. A lot!

The history of flying vehicles is littered with flawed inventions, failed dreams and (quite often) lots of broken bones. Still, these ten flying cars prove we've come a long way.

1. It all began with the “Artificial Albatross”

It's an odd quirk of history that the idea of a flying vehicle predates cars. In the early 18th Century, [Jean Marie Le Bris](#) looked at his horse drawn cart and decided it should fly. He set about designing what may be the first gliding vehicle.

He dubbed his odd invention the “[Artificial Albatross](#).” It sported a 50-foot wing span and on its maiden flight it very nearly killed Le Bris. You probably won't be shocked to learn that his invention was *not* a commercial success.

2. The Curtiss Autoplane hopped on to the world stage ... sort of

In 1917, our quest to conquer land and air was taken up by inventor, thrill-seeker, and all-around galavanter, Glenn Curtis. Now Curtis knew a thing or two about speed, having set the world's land speed record in his younger years. He knew the secret to flight was ditching the horse and opting for a newfangled thing called an engine. The [Curtiss Autoplane](#) was born.

Sadly, its meager 75 horsepower engine was insufficient for the task. The best it could manage was the occasional, embarrassing hop. Curtis was humiliated and his dream of a flying car hopped off into the sunset. He had the right idea, but the technology just wasn't there yet.

3. The Brits doubled down on the terror stakes with the Rotabuggy

You might expect a flying horsedrawn death trap to win the prize for most terrifying vehicle in this list. Not so. The [Hafner Rotabuggy](#) earns that distinction. Built by the British Airborne Forces in 1943, the Rotabuggy was designed to provide ground transport to troops in enemy territory. The catch: [you had to](#)

[drop it out of a plane.](#)

The good folks at British Airborne deemed a power source unnecessary for the Rotabuggy. Instead you simply waited for air resistance to cause the rotors to spin ... you know, on account of the whole plummeting to earth at terminal velocity thing.

The Hafner Rotabuggy project was dropped in favor of other (hopefully less gut-wrenchingly terrifying) transport technologies.

4. Then the Convaircar arrived ... and promptly disappeared

In 1947 aircraft manufacturer Consolidated Vultee decided it was high time to rekindle humanity's romance with car plane hybrids. Enter the [Convaircar](#).

Resembling a hyperactive child's misguided attempt to stick a toy plane onto the roof of a toy car, the Convair car was an unholy union of aerodynamics and vehicular engineering.

With its 35-foot wingspan the Convaircar was nothing short of a masterpiece in true impracticality. After the prototype crashed, consumer confidence died and the project was scuttled, which really was probably for the best.

5. The fateful tale of Henry Smolinski and his flying (falling) Ford Pinto

Let's jump to the 1970s. Flares had taken the fashion world by storm, but more importantly for this story, aeronautical technology had come a long way. [Henry Smolinski](#) was an inventor and entrepreneur who felt he had finally discovered the secret to unlocking the car plane.

Instead of building a flying plane from scratch, Henry decided it'd be far less hassle and more commercially viable to simply chop the wing section of a Cessna plane and weld it to a trusty Ford Pinto.

What could go wrong? Unfortunately, quite a lot as Henry soon discovered. The vehicle experienced catastrophic aeronautical integrity collapse. In other words, the wings fell off. Smolinski and his business partner died and the dream of that awesome flying Pinto died with them.

6. Then the 21st Century hit and the Super Sky Cycle changed the equation

By now you're probably detecting a pattern. Flying cars up until this point fell into one of three categories. Either they 1) simply didn't work; 2) kind of worked but weren't commercially viable; or 3) were so terrifying, no-one in their right mind would go anywhere near it.

Then along came an inventor named Larry Neal who developed a vehicle in 2009 called the [Super Sky Cycle](#). Shockingly, it worked! Neal's cool helicopter motorcycle design actually began to approach what so many inventors had strived to accomplish since the earliest days of the Artificial Albatross. You can even see it in action [here](#).

Tragically, the business venture collapsed. It was still too expensive and risky to work as a commercial product.

But the tide had turned.

7. The Kitty Hawk Flyer. So close yet so far.

All around the world, different companies began to take advantage of new technologies to find a product which both worked and could become profitable.

Kitty Hawks' recently released "[Flyer](#)" hit the news in 2018 as one of the world's first passenger drones. Its flight time is around 20 minutes and it can only be used over water. A very nifty idea to be sure, but it's far from being a true sky and road hybrid.

It was a case of so close yet so far.

8. The Liberty Pioneer

It was in early 2018 that Dutch emergent car technologies firm [PAL-V](#) unveiled the world's first fully developed and commercially available flying car. You read that right! After two hundred years of failures, an actual bona fide flying car is slated to hit the markets in early 2019.

It's gorgeous to behold, too! With its tapered front and fighter jet style cockpit, it truly looks like a cross between a car and a plane. [Take a look for yourself](#).

By the way, they're practically giving these away at \$620,000. One can always dream (or sell a kidney).

9. The BlackFly

The Liberty Pioneer is not the only flying car about to burst onto the market. California startup Opener recently announced the World's first vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) aircraft - The [BlackFly](#).

This odd-looking craft resembles a cross between a drone and a space-age coffin. Despite its ominous appearance this craft is particularly interesting because it [won't require its driver](#) to have a pilot's license. This improved accessibility may well be a game-changer.

10. Where's it all going? Uber's vision of an autonomous flying taxi service

While the Liberty Pioneer and BlackFly are still niche items for the most adventurous and wealthy among us, other companies are working with autonomous driving technology to bust the flying car market wide open.

Take Uber as an example. Their lofty vision is to place flying car technology into a lot more hands by releasing completely autonomous flying vehicles to the market as early as 2023!

If the history of flying vehicles tells us anything, it's that, for whatever reason, we humans are determined to make flying cars happen. It looks like after two hundred years of struggle and innovation we won't have to be patient too much longer.

Sources

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