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A Defense Technology Blog



#### Air Launched UAVs Extend Poseidon's Reach

Posted by Bill Sweetman at 6/11/2008 1:10 AM CDT

When the US Navy picked the 737-based Boeing P-8A to replace the P-3C Orion, some wondered whether the jet would match the P-3's efficiency at low altitude. The answer - it doesn't. Dipping to low level uses a lot of fuel and eats into endurance. As a result, the Navy has two projects going that use air-launched UAVs to complement the manned airplane. They're on show this week at the AUVSI convention in San Diego.

One program is looking at expendable UAVs that can be launched from standard sonobuoy tubes. Three designs are being funded for tests out of the Navy's Patuxent River flight test center, starting with launches from a Raytheon C-12 and continuing with trials from a P-3 later this year. They include Lite Machines' Voyeur, a design from L3 and the Advanced Ceramics Research Coyote. These vehicles are electrically powered and expendable, and the initial configuration would carry an electro-optical or infra-red sensor, mainly for positive visual ID of ships below a cloud deck.



Advanced Ceramics Coyote

More complex requirements are the goal of the Wing and Bomb Bay Launched (WBBL) UAV program. The Navy has Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) contracts in this area with Piasecki, for its Turais UAV, and Acuity Technologies, with the AT-3 Owl. The WBBL-UAV systems are bigger, weighing up to 1,000 lb, and carry multiple payloads (including up to ten sonobuoys), and have an endurance of up to eight

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hours. They are also designed so that they can recover to a land base after a mission.



AT-3 Owl

The Owl, for instance, has a large weapon bay and a 36 hp UEL rotary engine driving a ducted fan. The UAV could be used to expand a patrol airplane's surveillance area, or could be a gap-filler if the manned aircraft had to return to base because of an equipment problem. Phase II contracts, including tests of full-scale mechanical demonstrators, were awarded in May.

pics by Bill Sweetman

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 **ghemago** wrote:

Did anyone ever presented a system to recover UAVs from a large aircraft like the 737 or I should file a patent?

6/11/2008 3:07 AM CDT

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 **Sean Meade** wrote:

for that, you should file a patent ;-)

otherwise, we're probably looking at disposable (see above), ship or land recovery.

6/11/2008 11:19 AM CDT

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 **ghemago** wrote:

Sean, my thoughts were that we can have automatic dockings in the space and aircrafts are actually joined together when refueled (probe and drogue). Combining the 2 technologies, with the later to pull inside (or under a pylon) the UAV, the could be something to try, but I'm not Burt Rutan.

6/11/2008 1:40 PM CDT

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 **ghemago** wrote:

Correction:  
"the could be something to try" --> "that could be something to try"

6/11/2008 1:41 PM CDT

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 **Abraham Gubler** wrote:

Yes people have designed aircraft launched and recovered air vehicle systems. They have even been in service with the USN LTAs in the 1930s that could launch and recover single engine fighters.

One of Virginia Tech's entries in the AIAA design competitions a few years ago featured a S-3, E-2, ES-3, C-2 replacement called the

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