

GERMAN INDUSTRY SEEKS 2026 FIGHTER COMMITMENT

Eight leading German defense and aerospace companies are urging their government to decide on the path forward for a future combat aircraft before year-end to safeguard local industrial expertise following the demise of

the Franco-German-Spanish New Generation Fighter program.

The contractual progress is required to meet Germany's ambitious timeline of fielding a next-generation stealth fighter before 2040, argues the octet of Airbus, Autofly, Diehl, Hensoldt,

Liebherr, MBDA, MTU Aero Engines, and Rohde & Schwarz.

"We can't lose time," the group said as it unveiled its position paper, signed yesterday. The companies applauded the government for ending the stalled fighter program under the Future Combat Air

System, noting it opens new pathways to developing a modern aircraft. They said "an efficient, new setup is essential" to achieve the desired results, a reflection of frustration with the industrial setup of the prior program.

Germany has to take a leadership position, Team Gen 6 argues, while being open to multi-national cooperation among like-minded countries. A sixth-generation fighter, along with associated air capabilities, will preserve the military's ability to deter conflict and, should that fail, prevail in combat, they asserted.

Funding issues

One of the drivers for the appeal is that some of the technology development contracts involved in the now-defunct fighter program have run out of funds or are about to, threatening the ability to sustain core technical expertise.

Contractual arrangements need to start to emerge this year to avoid that happening, the companies said. Some of the technologies emerging from the effort could also have civil applications, they added.

Pursuing a new program would strengthen critical German industrial competencies, the companies said. The industrial partners added they could address the key elements of a new fighter program, including sensors, communications, mission equipment, propulsion technology, weaponization, low observability and systems integration. ▲



Rolls-Royce's presence here at ILA is dominated by a model of the UltraFan 80, the world's largest and most advanced aero-engine technology demonstrator.

It is a homegrown project, explains Stefan Wriege, Vice-President External Communications. "It is designed and is being tested here in

Germany. The Trent XWB is the most efficient widebody engine flying today, and the UltraFan will be 10% more efficient."

The company is also developing the UltraFan 30. Planned for ground testing in 2028, the program is targeting a 20% fuel burn improvement on in-service engines. Wriege says:

"Rolls-Royce wants to be back in the narrowbody market. We are at ILA to talk about what it takes to build such an engine, such a powerplant, and how we can scale the technology."

He adds: "We want to highlight our capabilities in Germany. We can design an engine, build it, certify it and all the service around it."



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Hydef Consortium Settles On Single Mission Concept

Consortium partners working on the European Hypersonic Defense Interceptor (Hydef) project have settled on a single missile concept they will take forward into a contest that could lead to the development of a ground and sea-based defense system capable of downing hypersonic threats.

The seven-meters long, three-stage Hydef missile concept has been designed for maximum agility in the end game, Harald Buschek, Diehl Defense's Chief Program Officer says. The missile would be equipped with launching and mid-course boosters and the kill vehicle.

"The kill vehicle has agility because it is smaller, its lighter and you don't have this big moment of inertia," Buschek explains. "You can actually throw this [kill vehicle] around in the last milliseconds or less to have a direct hit on the target."

Diehl Defense is one of the lead members of the Hydef consortium alongside Spanish Missile Systems (SMS). It is one of two hypersonic defense interceptor efforts in Europe, the other being the Hypersonic Defense Interceptor System (Hydis²) led by MBDA. Officials from the latter at the show say they are in the process of finalizing their concept selection.

Hydef and Hydis² are both funded by the European



▲ Diehl Defense's CEO Helmut Rauch (left) with Harald Buschek at the show.

Union's European Defense Fund (EDF) and will go on to inform the development of a pan-European hypersonic defense system currently codenamed Twister.

However, only one of the two concepts will move forward into a second phase of the project – the €100 million (\$115 million) High-End Endo-Atmospheric Interception initiative – also to be funded by EDF and due to begin in 2027, which will pave the way for demonstrations of the interceptor technologies.

Germany On The Hunt For Deep Strike Options

Germany is scrambling to figure out how to quickly address a need for deep strike weapons amid uncertainty about an earlier plan to rely, in the near-term plan, around the appearance of U.S. systems.

"We have to be faster. We have to see what is on the market," German Chief of Defense Staff Gen. Carsten Breuer said at an Atlantic Bridge event yesterday.

Germany had a relatively structured plan to fill its needs for a deep strike system with the goal of having such a capability in the country to deter Russia. The first step involved the U.S. deploying such a system to Germany, followed by the latter's acquisition of the Typhon system it formally asked to buy last year, and then the fielding of a home-grown European system. But the U.S. has nixed plans for its deployment and German officials now don't expect the Typhon sale to materialize.

"If there is a gap, we will find a way to mitigate it," Breuer said. "How can we procure a long-range fire capability which fits into this plan?" The goal, he indicated, is to have something in country by 2029, a year Germany has identified as critical given the threat from Russia.

There is no change in the ultimate objective of having a European system, he said. Germany is a key partner in the so-called European Long-Range Strike Approach program others have joined.



European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut Sophie Adenot described the range of science, arts, medical and educational experiments and events ongoing on the International Space Station, and the thrill of talking to the Artemis astronauts in space, during a live video link-up at the show. She was joined on the call by ESA Director General Dr. Josef Aschbacher, ESA Director of Human and Robotic Exploration Daniel Neuenschwander, ESA astronauts Matthias Maurer and Alexander Gerst and former Astronaut, Dr. Thomas Reiter.

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Fresh Appearance For Next Generation Do228

One of the world's longest-lived commercial and paramilitary aircraft is being shown in its latest incarnation at the show.

General Atomics AeroTec Systems (GA-AS) is overseeing the first public debut of the Dornier 228NXT. The aircraft has been in production for more than 40 years and has been steadily updated over the decades.

The aircraft is widely used in civil, military and paramilitary/special mission roles, with its rectangular cross-section fuselage providing a large amount of useful space both for passengers in the 19-seat regional airline market and for equipment in its non-commercial roles.

The aircraft's STOL capabilities, together with its ability to operate



▲ Dornier's 228NXT incorporates a modernized flightdeck with four large Universal displays.

from unpaved runways, makes it popular for operating out of small airfields for missions such as maritime surveillance and border patrol. The NXT incorporates a modernized flightdeck with four large Universal displays – one

primary flight display (PFD) and one multi-function display (MFD) in front of both the captain and first officer. An electronic standby instrument system is installed between the two MFDs.

Additionally, GA-AS has introduced a renewed supply chain and increased in-house production of components, giving it more control over the production process.

CCA Classification Change Offers Boon For GA-AS

A U.S. Air Force classification change to the Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) program could give a boost to General Atomics Aeronautical Systems' (GA-AS) marketing campaign in Europe. The Air Force originally classified all works on CCAs as a special access program, meaning it shared a classification status similar to Boeing's secretive F-47 fighter. The approach kept a tight lid on details about the CCA program, but also made it hard for the two companies chosen to participate in Increment 1 to share information with potential foreign buyers.

But GA-AS now expects the U.S. government to approve an export license for sharing information with certain foreign buyers soon. "So the doors are going to open now," says GA-AS President David Alexander.

Germany and the Netherlands are the two countries in Europe at the most advanced stages of the acquisition process for CCAs. Germany plans to introduce the country's still-unchosen CCA in 2029. The Netherlands has agreed to participate in the Air Force's test and evaluation program with the Increment 1 operational prototypes, which include the GA-AS YFQ-42 Dark Merlin and the Anduril Industries YFQ-44.

"We're glad we have the class guide change, so we can get an export license and share all the information on the platform side," Alexander says.



German Naval Air Command is impressed with Poseidon introduction, pictured Captain Broder Nielsen

Bright Start For P-8As

The integration of Boeing's P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft in German service has gone impressively well, according to the head of the country's Naval Air Command.

Within three months of starting duty, the first of the service's P-8As had deployed to the Indo-Pacific region for exercises, says Captain Broder Nielsen.

Germany has ordered eight of the Boeing 737-based P-8As; three are in service, two more will be delivered by autumn and the remaining three in 2027.

They replace Lockheed Martin P-3 Orions and the difference in ease of operation is

significant, Nielsen says.

After an eight-hour patrol in the turboprop-powered Orion, crew emerged from the aircraft "looking as though they'd been partying all night." Their tiredness was down to the lack of cohesion in the aircraft's maritime surveillance systems.

In contrast, he says the atmosphere in the new Poseidon is very calm. "The mission set-up means that the TACO [tactical co-ordinator] and Co-TACO have a super overview of all the workstations; in the P-3 they were dislocated all over the aircraft."

Nielsen repeatedly noted the degree of international co-opera-

tion between Poseidon operators, such as Norway, the UK, U.S., Australia and New Zealand. There has been extensive sharing of experience and expertise between international crews.

Germany is looking at acquiring three more P-8As. Nielsen declines to comment directly on this, but adds: "You can never fulfill my operational needs. If you gave me 10, I would ask for more."

He adds that the Bundesmarine is looking at purchasing more U.S.-manufactured Mk54 torpedoes for the Poseidons and hopes that, through the aircraft, the service will regain its former anti-surface ship missile capability.

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ESA Eyes Ariane 6 For Human Spaceflight

As Europe pursues a goal to become more autonomous in space, the European Space Agency is exploring what options its Ariane 6 launcher can provide to take astronauts to orbit.

The Ariane 6 is Europe's flagship heavy lift rocket that has been used to deploy spacecraft for two years now. While it is not human-rated, "this is something that we're investigating right now," says ESA Director General Josef Aschbacher (pictured).

A final assessment has not been made, but Aschbacher was upbeat about the prospects. "The chances are pretty high, or pretty good, that this can be materialized," he told reporters at the show. It would require some adaptation of the rocket, he acknowledges.

The issue around transporting astronauts is climbing up the European political agenda as in September France looks to host a space summit and ESA plans an inter-ministerial meeting in December on human exploration.

ESA also is developing another element that could give Europe greater independence from the U.S. and Russia, its primary partners to take crew to the International Space Station and back. The agency is working with Thales Alenia Space and The Exploration Co. on cargo return capsules that could evolve into human carrying vehicles.

Aschbacher notes that SpaceX's crew-carrying Dragon capsule also began as a cargo hauling vehicle and took several years to reach the point it was allowed to transport astronauts.

Airbus PioneerLab Trials Aerodynamic Modifications

Airbus is experimenting with aerodynamic adaptations that could transform the performance of its conventional helicopters.

Using its German H145 light twin-engine helicopter-based PioneerLab – one of four flying rotorcraft laboratories operated by the airframer – Airbus is testing an aerodynamics improvement kit that changes the cross section of the tail boom and re-sculpts the rear fuselage.

Combined, the modifications are expected to increase lift performance and reduce drag, potentially leading to reductions in fuel burn, as well as increases in payload and performance. To test the modifications, the company has produced composite fairings that can be scabbed onto the tail boom and rear fuselage. A modified horizontal stabilizer has also been added, fitted with downturned tips.

The modified tail boom with a diamond, rather than oval, shaped



cross section, takes downward airflow from the main rotor and directs it in the same direction as airflow from the anti-torque system

"We produce, for nothing, part of the anti-torque and therefore reduce the power required by the fenestron [ducted anti-torque system]," says Johannes Plaum, Airbus Helicopters Head of Research and Technology in Germany (pictured).

A similar tail boom is fitted to the Racer high-speed compound rotor-

craft demonstrator, but it's the first time such a system has been incorporated onto an Airbus conventional rotorcraft. Early flight demonstrations have shown the modifications have reduced induced drag in low-speed flight and improved stability in forward flight.

The company will also experiment with a new aft body shape later in-flight testing, although it has been fitted on the aircraft in the static display.

Canada Leads Clean Aviation Collaboration

RTX's Pratt and Whitney Canada business is demonstrating a new hybrid electric propulsion technology that aims to transform regional air travel. The PHARES project will integrate a 250-kilowatt electric motor to relieve the thermal engine and improve performance, reducing overall fuel burn throughout the mission.

Anne Saint-Roch, Project

Coordinator, PHARES says: "The project is developing an advanced hybrid electric propulsion system with the objective of achieving 20% improved fuel efficiency. We plan to test all these technologies on the ground test demo, and in flights on the Demetra project led by ATR."

PHARES aims to deliver a ground demonstrator in 2029, featuring an advanced Pratt & Whit-

ney Canada turboprop engine, combined with a Collins Aerospace 250kW electric motor, controller and optimized propeller.

Saint-Roch adds: "We are planning to do the ground test demo and the flight test demo in 2029 and if everything is successful, we plan entry into service in 2035. We believe that hybrid technology can have a wide application on different platforms."

PHARES is the product of collaboration between Europe and Canada's aerospace industries. Saint-Roch says: "Our consortium involves strong European expertise, with 11 partners in Europe."

Several research institutions are supporting the project, including in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland.



▲ Anne Saint-Roch, PHARES Project Coordinator with the new hybrid electric propulsion technology being demonstrated at the show.

A photograph of an aircraft's wing and engine, viewed from a low angle looking up at the sky. The wing is white and extends across the top of the frame. The engine is a large, white, multi-fan jet engine, partially visible on the right side. The background is a bright blue sky filled with soft, white clouds.

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Zeiss Scans The Competition At First ILA Appearance

It is the first time at the show for German company Zeiss, a technology enterprise operating in the optics and optoelectronics industries. The company is displaying a range of its products, including its T-SCAN Hawk 2, which was launched in 2024.

"The portable T-SCAN Hawk 2, the next-generation lightweight 3D laser scanner, stands out for its metrological precision and remarkable ease of use. It scans large parts without having to disassemble them, so it can detect any issue, such as a hole or crack.

"Regardless of the task or location, it's a powerful tool that fits right in your hand," says Johannes Kohl, Industry Quality Solutions at

Zeiss. Also on display is the Zeiss DuraMax, which combines robustness, precision and efficiency, making it the ideal choice for at-line measurements directly on the production floor.

"DuraMax is unaffected by harsh environmental conditions and withstands even high temperatures. It enables rapid single-point measurements as well as the scanning of contours and freeform surfaces, thus eliminating the need for fixed gauges," Kohl says.

"Imagine the quality assurance processes at OEMs – they use these kinds of devices to get a clear picture of whether the quality of their parts meets standards. We sell thousands worldwide."



Images: Billy-Pix

EAGLE-EYED HAWK 2

Johannes Kohl with the T-SCAN Hawk 2 scanning the nose landing gear of an Embraer Legacy 650.

Starring Role In Rescue Mission

Airbus Helicopters is debuting the prototype of a specialist life-saving product developed in collaboration with the German army. The Rescue Star is designed as an attachment to the Airbus H145M helicopter, when undertaking search and rescue missions.

Dominik Vogel, Airbus Helicopters, says: "Weighing just 6kg (13 lb), this lightweight prototype is attached to the outside of the aircraft, and can carry a maximum of 1,500kg (3,300 lb). This is up to 10 people, or non-human cargo such as an ATV, or a combination. It is floatable, so suitable for rescue at sea, making it ideal for either military or civilian use."

The German army operates a fleet of H145M light combat and utility helicopters.



Take The Controls With Stimulating Simulators



Visitors to the show, young and old, can try their hand at learning to fly with two simulators outside Hall B, provided by Flugsimulator Frankfurt. The motion 4DOF (four degrees of freedom) simulators deliver physical movement to make you feel like you're actually in the cockpit.

"The simulators let you fly any jet aircraft type, from Airbus A320s and Boeing B737s to fighter jets and helicopters," says CEO Alexander Schleyer (pictured). "You can also choose to fly anywhere in the world – starting from Berlin, New York, wherever you like. It also simulates all weather conditions, as well as technical issues such as engine failure."

Currently popular as a fun activity for both adults and children, the simulators are well worth a visit. And if you miss them at the show, you can also find them at Frankfurt Airport.

Fueling A Green Revolution

Airbus joined the Clean Aviation stand here at the show with a 1:8 mock-up of its hydrogen-based fuel cell system, which is at the core of the manufacturer's ZEROe initiative. Airbus has been evaluating hydrogen power through the ZEROe project since 2020 and last year opted to take forward hydrogen fuel cell technology as the propulsion method for the future aircraft.



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Myneric: Making Connections Count

Myneric, a developer and producer of laser communications technology, is displaying its Condor optical communication terminals at its stand.

The company's product range for space applications covers space-to-space, space-to-air, and space-to-ground connectivity for satellites in both low-Earth orbit (LEO) and medium-Earth orbit (MEO).

"Our optical communication terminals are the backbone for all the constellations of the U.S.

Space Development Agency's (SDA) program," says Dr. Martin Haunschild, Head of Business Development Space (pictured).

"Our Condor product line of optical communication terminals for satellites in LEO is capable of establishing reliable broadband and secure links for inter-plane and intra-plane scenarios, independently of satellite motion," he explains. "They have been built from the ground up to be suitable for serial manufacturing, rapid satellite integration and mass deployment."



The terminals enable safe and secure data transmission at up to 100Gbps over distances of up to 6,500 kilometers (4,000 miles).

The Munich-based company has

supplied more than 40 terminals to the U.S. with another 80 on the launch pad, making it the largest supplier of optical communication terminals in the country.

Plath Concept Closes The EW Gap

Hamburg-based Plath Systems & Integration is presenting its 'Closing the Gap' concept at the show. The meshed unmanned EW core concept is designed to expand existing capabilities in signal-based reconnaissance and electronic warfare and close critical sensor gaps in operational environments.

'Closing the Gap' uses networked, unmanned sensor technology to extend existing reconnaissance capabilities flexibly and scalably. At the heart of the concept are EW Micro-Cells, which are deployed into the operational area by unmanned platforms – such as UAVs.

These compact, cost-effective sensor nodes passively detect electromagnetic signals and create an additional, distributed sensor layer.

The cells connect via a self-organising mesh network, which operates without a fixed infrastructure, adapts dynamically to changing conditions and remains functional even during disruptions or failures of individual nodes. Depending on the application scenario, data is transmitted continuously, on an event-driven basis or with a time delay.



Diehl's Visionary Design

Diehl Aviation is showcasing the beauty of its future cabin concept. Silvan Fiedler, Manager Industrial Design, Product Innovation and Digitalization, (left) explains: "It is focused on lightweight design and biotechnic-inspired structures, but also on sustainability."

The design features wide interactive wall panels, displaying digital content. Fiedler says: "There are real windows, with a transparent display on top, so the passenger has a completely new

experience. They can get information about the landscape and the things they see outside, supported by AI, as well as control the cabin management system."

Sustainability elements include recycled carbon fibers, such as from OEMs' wing production, and 3D-printed parts. Initially expected to be taken up by business aviation, Fiedler believes that in time the new technology will also be embraced by commercial aviation.

ATRA's Nose Job Runs Radars

German Aerospace Center (DLR) is showcasing a model of its Advanced Technology Research Aircraft (ATRA), based on the Airbus A320, but with a unique defense twist.

At the DLR stand, a spokesperson says: "The jet serves as a test and development platform that can dramatically accelerate development times for different systems and, amongst these, radar systems."

Although the ATRA has been used for around 10 years to test areas such as fuel efficiency, low-noise configurations, cabin accommodation and aerodynamics research, it now has an additional

role. He explains: "The aircraft now has a new nose structure, as part of an exclusive project with Airbus Defense and Space, developing new radar technologies."

The unique addition, the nose of a Eurofighter jet that Airbus engi-

neers from Manching developed and assembled specifically for the test aircraft, houses the AESA-MK1 radar (Active Electronically Scanned Array). In addition, Airbus has installed extensive test equipment in the A320 ATRA cabin.



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UVision Debuts AI-Powered Battle Management System

UVision has launched its new AI-powered Battle Intelligence and Mission Management system, Cortex BI, here at the show.

The system is designed to connect sensors, decision-making algorithms and precision-guided weapons across air, land and maritime domains.

“The goal is to shorten the sensor-to-shooter cycle, increase operational flexibility, reduce cognitive load on operators and enable coordinated management across air, land and sea domains,” says UVision Head of Marketing &

Sales Erez Meir (pictured).

The platform enables dynamic mission coordination, resource allocation, simultaneous control of sensors and effectors, and synchronized execution of complex operational scenarios. It is built on a layered, modular architecture comprising three core layers: Sensors and Detection, Fusion and Decision Making, and Response and Mission Execution.

“The battlefield of the future will be defined by speed, scalability and connectivity across multiple domains,” says Meir.



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“As military forces increasingly deploy autonomous systems, sensors and effectors, the ability to unify and standardize command, control and mission execution across complex operational environments will become a critical success factor.

Cortex was designed to connect these layers – integrating operational reconnaissance, command and control systems, and diverse effectors into a scalable,

software-driven ecosystem.”

The software already has a launch customer and is scheduled for delivery in the first quarter of 2027.

UVision, an Israeli company with operations in the US, India and Europe, is expanding its European presence through UVision Europe, which will oversee production, technical support and marketing across the region.

Deutsche Aircraft Unveils UAV

Deutsche Aircraft has unveiled the uncrewed air vehicle (UAV) that will accompany the 328MR multi-role version of the company's forthcoming 328eco.

The 328MR is being designed for several roles, such as ISR, maritime surveillance and border patrol. It will have the capability to operate in concert with multiple UAVs, to expand significantly its area of coverage.

The UAV “comes from the Sierra Nevada universe,” says Deutsche Aircraft's Director, Product Roadmap and Innovation, Frederic Fischer. Sierra Nevada is Deutsche Aircraft's U.S. parent company.

It is powered by a 15 hp two-stroke engine powering a pusher propeller. The vehicle also has four vertical lift propellers mounted on wing sponsons. It has a maximum weight of around 100 kg (225 lb), of which 26 kg (57 lb) is available as payload.

“Depending on the amount of fuel you put on it, you have up to 16 hours of loitering time,” Fischer says, although this can vary significantly depending on the nature of the payload.

The first prototype of the UAV has been built and tested and is described as a mature, fully-developed product ready for production.

Vaeridion Passes 100 Microliner Commitments

Electric aircraft manufacturer Vaeridion has secured more than 100 commitments across cargo and passenger configurations in Europe for its 2030 entry-into-service book, signaling strong demand for its Microliner.

The business comes via Letters of Intent from six new customers – including regional and business operators, a lessor and an electric flight training provider – spanning Germany, Denmark, Ireland, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. The mix of passenger and freighter commitments builds on Belgian ASL Group's order of 10 aircraft announced in

June 2025 – its launch customer.

“Surpassing 100 commitments marks the most significant year in Vaeridion's journey to date, demonstrating both unprecedented market demand and our technical readiness to deliver on that demand,” says CEO Ivor van Dartel.

The company has also completed its aircraft-level Preliminary Design Review, a milestone that validates the aircraft architecture and moves the program toward its first flight, currently scheduled in 100 weeks. The Microliner is a clean-sheet, fully-electric aircraft capable of carrying up to nine passengers or 10 cubic meters of

cargo over 400 km (249 miles) under IFR conditions. It features modular battery systems and multi-engine propulsion for both passenger and cargo operators.

“With our market advisory committee – now representing more than 66 European airports – we can build the foundation for a pan-European regional air transportation system with the potential to cut both emissions and costs,” van Dartel adds.

“This will make a real difference for passengers in medium-sized cities and rural areas that are currently underserved, especially in Germany, where the domestic network has been shrinking and geopolitical pressures have made thin routes even harder to sustain.”

Since its launch, Vaeridion has moved from R&D into production and industrialization of certifiable, flight-ready systems, opening its first production and test hangar at Oberpfaffenhofen Airport and advancing its proprietary battery technology to a second-generation prototype.

“This will make a real difference for passengers in medium-sized cities and rural areas,” says CEO Ivor van Dartel (centre), pictured with Marcus Kochs-Kämper and Lt Gen (ret'd) Dennis Luyt.



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Helsing targets 2027 for the CA-1 Europa's first flight.

Collaborative Combat Aircraft Battle Brews In Germany

Likely bidders are lining up for a potential CCA competition for the German Air Force, report Robert Wall and Tony Osborne.

With a plan to augment its Eurofighter Typhoon fleet and eventual Lockheed Martin F-35s with collaborative combat aircraft, Germany is emerging as an early battleground for such aircraft in Europe.

The goal is to bring more combat mass to the German Air Force. Germany has indicated it sees a future in which collaborative combat aircraft (CCA) take on different roles in working with crewed platforms, but its initial focus is a fighter-bomber mission.

While a competition is not yet formally under way, likely bidders are already lining up to compete for a program that could end up encompassing hundreds of aircraft.

The contest is one of the hottest for CCAs outside the U.S. Germany wants to field something around 2029, although that may initially be mainly to experiment and refine operational concepts

before embarking on a more serious acquisition. The looming competition also spotlights a set of issues that are increasingly dominating European arms purchases: the desire for speed, national autonomy and the ability to scale.

Helsing is leaning heavily into its German roots and start-up mentality to accelerate development of the CA-1 Europa CCA. When the company unveiled the CA-1 in October, it set 2027 as the goal to get the vehicle airborne, aided by its acquisition of Grob Aircraft.

"All the suppliers are selected; things are being procured," says Alexander Busse, Associate Director for Programs at Helsing. There is still room for adjustments to reflect what will be learned in flight trials. Hardware and software tests are taking place in parallel to maintain pace.

One of the benefits of the Grob acquisition is the company's

experience in flight testing, although where that will take place is still in question. Helsing has indicated it would like to fly in Germany.

The country's regulators are trying to move with a heightened sense of urgency to adapt to current security needs. Still, securing approval to fly a vehicle in Germany as large as a CCA, uncrewed, comes with hurdles.

Staying on track

There are other options for flight testing in Europe, and Busse says the company is in talks with all of them in case it needs to go elsewhere to keep the program on track.

The time pressure will hardly ease up once the Europa is airborne. If Helsing wins a contract from the German government to produce vehicles, it will likely have to start delivering them soon. The German Air Force has indicated it would like to have some CCAs in

its inventory before the end of the decade.

"The first flight is super important," says Klaus Herrmann, Helsing's Director for Product Management. "But if we did this and then reconvened and said, 'Cool, what do we do now?' then we'd lose." The company is already working with suppliers to make sure it can scale up.

Helsing said its supplier choice has been driven by several goals, including having a truly European system. Even where the company might have to use items that fall under U.S. arms transfer regulations, such as in certain communications subsystems, it would design the vehicle to be able to operate without them.

Busse says another crucial factor is keeping costs low. A CCA cannot cost what a fighter does, which means using commercial or military off-the-shelf components.

● CONTINUED ON P16

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Helsing is drawing on Europe's automotive and industrial supplier networks, which are accustomed to producing highly reliable equipment to exacting standards. Where the company has been able to switch from aerospace suppliers to automotive ones, the price difference has been "significant" in some cases, Hermann says.

Germany is the lead target market for the start-up's Europa ambition, where demand for several hundred aircraft is anticipated. If you add other potential European buyers, the number jumps. "We think it's going to be many hundreds to low thousands," Hermann says.

Rival Rheinmetall has taken a different approach, believing there is insufficient time for the company to develop an aircraft from scratch. It has announced talks with Anduril regarding the YFQ-44A Fury, Boeing regarding its MQ-28 Ghost Bat and Lockheed Martin around its Vectis.

Combat system

The partner will provide what is effectively a truck, says Timo Haas, Head of Rheinmetall's Digital Division, which includes its air activities. Rheinmetall has told partners: "You have the aircraft, you have the wings, you have avionics, you have the jet engine, you have all that.

"But where we jump in is the so-called combat system, the final network when it comes to the sovereign part, communications, cryptographics and integration between platforms, mission systems, weapons, effectors, sensors and integration into that aircraft."

Still, a preferred near-term candidate has now emerged: the MQ-28. "They're the most advanced right now," Haas says.

Although Anduril is on contract with the Pentagon to test the Fury, Rheinmetall would rather see that system mature.

Haas says he is intrigued by Lockheed's Vectis, particularly given its Skunk Works pedigree and his own experience working with the company on the F-35. Rheinmetall is starting to build F-35 sections in partnership with Northrop Grumman for

"Airbus chose the Valkyrie because we know it works. We wanted to challenge ourselves, independent of future customers, to understand if we can bring a collaborative combat aircraft capability onto the market as soon as possible."

MARCO GUMBRECHT

AIRBUS DEFENSE AND SPACE, HEAD OF KEY ACCOUNTS FOR GERMANY

Lockheed. But the Vectis will not be ready for an end-of-decade delivery either, he says, judging it "higher in capability, but lower in availability."

Despite working with Boeing, the company could partner with a different manufacturer at a later stage.

Rheinmetall, at least in the early stages, does not plan to build the vehicles in Germany, instead focusing on ensuring they can be supported locally. Establishing a production line would require a larger production run that could emerge.

Airbus also has looked abroad for a partner, even though the

European airframer has designed and flown smaller uncrewed combat demonstrator aircraft in the past. Last year, it agreed to acquire two Kratos Defense & Security Solutions XQ-58A Valkyrie CCAs to missionize them for local requirements. It is preparing to flight-test its CCA technologies using a Valkyrie by year-end.

Airbus chose the Valkyrie because "we know it works," says Marco Gumbrecht, Airbus Defense and Space's Head of Key Accounts for Germany. "We wanted to challenge ourselves, independent of future customers, to understand if we can bring a collaborative combat aircraft capability onto the market as soon as possible."

The company plans to incorporate its Multi-platform Autonomous Reconfigurable and Secure system, which features artificial-intelligence-supported software known as Mindshare, on the Valkyrie.

Those have been tested onboard the company's DT25 target drones and other undisclosed platforms, building on experience dating back to Airbus predecessor programs involving the Barracuda uncrewed combat air vehicle demonstrator.

For the flight trials — currently planned for an undisclosed location in Europe — the Valkyries will be linked with Learjets operated by GFD acting as

Eurofighter surrogates.

The Learjets will carry representative Eurofighter hardware, as well as a Rafael Litening 5 targeting pod adapted with data links to communicate with the Valkyries or other uncrewed aircraft.

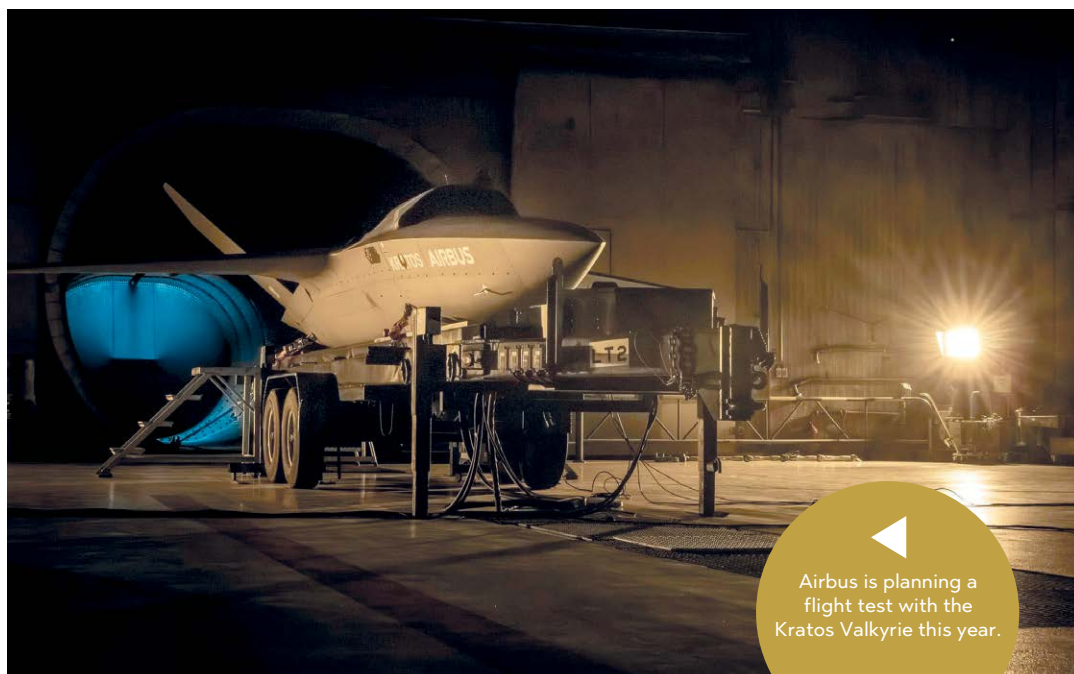
Integrating the data links into the Litening pod avoids sacrificing a Eurofighter weapons station for CCA communications equipment, Gumbrecht notes.

The flight trials will involve operators onboard the Learjets sending commands to formations of Valkyries that will include both live and simulated air systems. Several countries have explored using Link 16 to control CCAs. Airbus is instead employing dedicated data links to establish what Gumbrecht describes as a more "covert link."

Although Germany is the initial target market, Airbus, like its rivals, has wider ambitions in Europe.

Other contenders could enter the race. General Atomics is flying its YFQ-42A under the U.S. Air Force CCA Program and has signaled interest.

Like the U.S. Air Force, which is working with multiple vendors on its CCA program, Germany will likely award contracts to more than one supplier, at least in its early stage, and as it determines its real operational needs for such a system. ▲



Airbus is planning a flight test with the Kratos Valkyrie this year.

Airbus/Kratos



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PROJECT RUNWAY

Downtime ahead for display pilots

▶ Airbus Tiger attack helicopters from France and Germany clawed their way through the Berlin skies.



▶ The German Army showed off its newly delivered Airbus H145 utility helicopters.



◀ Going for the burn, the German Air Force Panavia Tornado commands the skies.

Out & About

There was plenty to see onsite and in the skies at this year's ILA



◀ Every bunny was excited to see the European flying debut of Leonardo's AW249.

◀ Far left: Cloud-busting in the Airbus A350-1000.



◀ Hangin' woof: A tail-wagging livery on the Spanish Air Force Eurofighter.

▶ Ground force: Preparing the Luna X-2000 uncrewed air system for flight.



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A321XLR in assembly line.

Supply Chain Pressures Test OEM Production Ambitions To Meet Demand

Daniel Williams, Director of Fleet Data Services for Aviation Week, reports.

Supply chain headaches continue to place considerable strain on both new-build production rates and the maintenance, repair and overhaul aftermarket. With buoyant demand – and even with possible headwinds due to ongoing conflict in the Middle East – there remains a pressing requirement, perhaps now more than ever, for operators to introduce newer, more fuel-efficient aircraft into service to offset rising fuel costs.

The ability of aircraft original equipment manufacturers to build and deliver aircraft has been significantly hampered in the post-pandemic world. By volume, the narrowbody market remains the largest segment, with Airbus and Boeing collectively building over 1,000 A220, A320 and 737

family aircraft in 2025. During that year, the A320 family became the most-delivered commercial aircraft program of all time, surpassing the 737's cumulative delivery totals – a symbolic milestone for the European manufacturer.

Aviation Week analysis of rolling three-month average production rates shows that during 2023, Airbus was globally producing around 45 A320 family aircraft per month, rising to approximately 50 in 2024. The year 2025 marked the beginning of a transition to higher rates, though this brought inevitable teething issues. These were further compounded by a fuselage panel defect discovered in late 2025.

While the issue impacts production only marginally, it has had an outsized effect on deliveries, as Airbus cannot hand over aircraft

with defective parts – hence the depressed delivery numbers in the first quarter of 2026. Airbus has also contended with delayed engine deliveries from both CFM International and, more acutely, Pratt & Whitney, each grappling with their own distinct supply chain challenges.

Boeing has traveled a markedly different path with its 737 line. Following the lifting of the delivery ban, Boeing ramped production to rate 32 during 2023. However, mid-year discoveries of improperly drilled aft bulkhead holes in fuselages supplied by Spirit AeroSystems forced rates downward.

As Spirit and Boeing worked through these issues, a prolonged machinists' strike further depressed average monthly production. Nevertheless, progress

has been made, with steps towards rate 42 virtually complete. Boeing will likely encounter similar challenges to those Airbus now faces once it pushes beyond 50 aircraft per month.

The A220, also classified as a narrowbody with 150 seats available in the A220-300 variant, has seen modest production rates as its backlog slowly diminished. However, a recent order for 150 high-density, 160-seat variants signals Airbus's intent to push rates higher – though production will remain constrained by parts and engine availability.

The widebody market, by contrast, produced just over 200 aircraft in 2025. These larger platforms naturally command lower production rates. Boeing

● CONTINUED ON P22

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remains the largest widebody producer. The 767 line, which includes the KC-46 for military customers, has held reasonably steady at two per month, leaving

its supply chain relatively insulated from broader disruptions. The 777 line, encompassing both the 777F freighter and the 777-9, maintains a rate of approximately 2.5 per month as the final 777Fs roll off the line while 777-9

production gradually ramps ahead of certification.

Boeing's single 787 line in Charleston, S.C., has seen rates recover since early 2023, when quality escapes were uncovered and subsequently rectified.

Although machinists at Charleston were not on strike, parts manufactured in Washington state were affected, creating knock-on impacts to production rates in early 2025.

With a renewed upward trajectory towards rate six, and Boeing's second assembly building scheduled to open in 2028, the outlook for 787 deliveries is improving.

Airbus' widebody lines have remained comparatively stable. The A350 line is producing around five aircraft per month, while the A330 line – which includes the Multi Role Tanker Transport variant – holds at approximately three per month. With ambitions to elevate the A350 rate into double figures by 2028, the program is poised to remain a cornerstone widebody platform for global connectivity in the years ahead.

As both manufacturers navigate persistent supply chain volatility, their ability to meet ambitious rate targets will hinge not only on internal execution but on the resilience and responsiveness of an increasingly strained supplier base. ▲

NARROWBODY 3 MONTH ROLLING AVERAGE PRODUCTION RATE JANUARY 2023 TO FEBRUARY 2026



WIDEBODY 3 MONTH ROLLING AVERAGE PRODUCTION RATE JANUARY 2023 TO FEBRUARY 2026



Source: Aviation Week Intelligence Network Fleet Discovery database © Informa



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