

Why the Skies Will Not Be Full of Flying Cars

There's a reason why we don't already have them

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Production prototype of the Terrafugia Transition at the New York International Auto Show, 2012. (Wikimedia Commons)

Terrafugia recently flight-tested its prototype "roadable aircraft," the Transition, accompanied by much media buzz about the next revolution in transportation .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6MVO4m0vaE>



I applaud Terrafugia's up-front marketing strategy: they have always marketed the Transition to pilots and those who are willing to earn a pilot's license. The company has never

claimed that road-ragers can untangle themselves from traffic jams by pressing a GO UP button in their Transitions and VTOL-ing up and away, like a scene from The Fifth Element.

But here's the catch: All involved admit a flying car tends to combine the worst of both vehicles, so for \$279,000, you get an underperforming car AND an underperforming airplane in one silly-looking vehicle. In its FAQs, Terrafugia notes, "If bad weather is encountered en route, the pilot can land and drive without worrying about ground transportation..."

Sounds nifty keen-o, but most pilots planning a cross-country flight will check the weather on their route, and prepare to file an instrument flight plan if need be; if they lack an instrument rating, they will schedule the flight for another day. I doubt they find much of an advantage in buying a so-so airplane with which they can land in case of bad weather and continue on in a so-so car. Why not just drive your car to the airport and fly your airplane, like pilots have done since dinosaurs roamed the earth? Not to be a Luddite, but If it ain't broke, don't fix it, especially with a \$279,000 patch kit.

On the other hand, Maverick, the ITEC flying car, does make sense for missionary pilots, the military, poaching patrols, and powerline surveys. It's a straightforward all-terrain vehicle with a parasail-type wing in which one can navigate dunes and grassland and skim over floodplains or other deal-breakers — for about \$90,000.

I'm not bad-mouthing Terrafugia: their hearts and minds are in the right place. It's just that the idea of a flying car has been around for decades, and there's a reason why we don't have one by now: no market beyond novelty buyers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN6IIPBNRMO>

