

Beechcraft's Light Attack Aircraft Takes Flight

The Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — Beechcraft celebrated Tuesday the inaugural flight of its first production AT-6 light attack aircraft, trying to move on after the bitter loss of a high-stakes U.S. contract for which it had initially designed the plane.

The Wichita-based aircraft maker unveiled the plane at its headquarters as it tries to market its new military plane to U.S. partner nations.

The company said the aircraft helps meet the needs of smaller countries which want smaller aircraft to defend their borders and to fly surveillance and reconnaissance missions. The plane is a version of the company's T-6 aircraft, but the new model can be outfitted with laser-guided rockets, bombs and other munitions.

The plane was initially planned to compete for a \$427 million contract from the U.S. Air Force, which wanted 20 light air support planes for Afghanistan. That contract could be worth as much as \$1 billion, depending on future orders. Its loss to a competitor after a three-year battle marked by legal challenges from both sides dealt a major blow to Beechcraft as it emerged from bankruptcy protection.

Beechcraft is now touting the 1,600 hours already logged on its AT-6 test aircraft as it tries to market the aircraft to other countries.

"This achievement highlights the tremendous effort of the entire Beechcraft team involved in the design, development and production of the AT-6," CEO Bill Boisture said in a statement. "We have seen a growing interest in the AT-6 from the defense establishment around the world and we are eager to provide proven reliability and a cost effective solution to meet the light attack mission needs of our customers."

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