



WORLD'S LARGEST AMPHIBIOUS AIRCRAFT TAKES OFF IN CHINA

News / Manufacturer



China's homegrown AG600, the world's largest amphibious aircraft in production, took to the skies on Sunday for its maiden flight.

The plane, codenamed Kunlong, according to the state news agency Xinhua, took off from the southern city of Zhuhai and landed after a flight of roughly an hour.

With a wingspan of 38.8 metres (127ft) and powered by four turboprop engines, the aircraft is capable of carrying 50 people and can stay airborne for 12 hours.

"Its successful maiden flight makes China among the world's few countries capable of developing a large amphibious aircraft," the chief designer, Huang Lingcai, told Xinhua.

The amphibious aircraft has military applications but will be used for firefighting and marine rescue, with at least 17 orders placed so far with the state-owned manufacturer Aviation Industry Corp of China, state media reported.

While it is about the size of a Boeing 737, the AG600 is considerably smaller than the billionaire Howard Hughes' flying boat, known as the Spruce Goose, which had a wingspan of 97 metres and a length of 67 metres and made only one brief flight, in 1947.

The AG600's flight capabilities put all of China's island-building projects in the South China Sea well within range.

"Its 4,500km operational range and ability to land and take off from water makes it well suited for deployment over China's artificial islands," said James Char, a military analyst at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

The aircraft can fly to the southernmost edge of China's territorial claims – the James Shoal – in four hours from the southern city of Sanya, the state-owned Global Times reported.

The shoal is also claimed by Taiwan and Malaysia, and is administered by Malaysia. The collection of submerged rocks lies roughly 80km from Malaysia's coastline and about 1,800km from the Chinese mainland.

"The plane's capacity and manoeuvrability makes it ideal for transporting material to those maritime features that are too structurally fragile to support runways," Char said.

Beijing's buildup in the South China Sea, through which \$5bn in annual trade passes, is hotly contested by other countries.

The Philippines for many years was one of the region's strongest opponents of Chinese expansionism, and brought a complaint to a United Nations-backed tribunal. The panel ruled last year that China's territorial claims in the sea were without legal basis, but the Philippines has backed away from the dispute under its new president, Rodrigo Duterte.

The launch of the new amphibious aircraft further strengthens China's rapidly modernising military. This year it launched its first domestically built aircraft carrier, the Type 001A. This complemented the Liaoning, a secondhand Soviet carrier commissioned in 2012 after extensive refits.

China's military expenditure in 2016 was an estimated \$215bn, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, putting it in first place in Asia, well ahead of India (\$56bn), Japan (\$46bn) and South Korea (\$37bn).

Image result for World's largest amphibious aircraft takes off in China

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