

Your Future Commute Could Be by Taxi Drone

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A Chinese startup has developed a flying car that it plans to roll out as soon as next year.

EHang Inc.'s E-184 drone can carry one passenger in its small cockpit, but the firm says it's working on a model that can carry two. EHang's Chief Executive Officer Hu Huazhi says they'll be in operation as "taxi drones" in Dubai in 2018 — as long as they get approval from regulators there.

Four battery-powered propellers lift the drone off the ground, and it's equipped with fully-automated navigation, according to CEO Hu. Passengers select a pre-programmed flight path and then strap in for the ride. The E-184 has a cruising speed of up to 100 kilometers (62 miles) an hour and can stay in the air for 25 minutes, the company says.



Hu Huazhi with the E-184 drone.

Photographer: Qilai Shen/Bloomberg

It's currently being tested at EHang's headquarters: a disused theme-park on the outskirts of Guangzhou, southern China, a city that's at the vanguard of the country's push to move away from cheap, low-end manufacturing and toward cutting-edge technology.

"We will start mass production of our passenger drones at the beginning of next year," Hu told Bloomberg TV. "We also plan to install fully automated production lines to enlarge manufacturing capacity in 2018."

EHang has big ambitions — it wants to develop a network of taxi drones around the world. The company plans to sign deals in Saudi Arabia, Singapore and "several European cities" next year, the CEO said.

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