

Airbus launches H160M flight test campaign

Marignane, France, 24 July 2025 – Airbus Helicopters has started flight-testing the H160M Guépard. This militarised version of the H160 is being developed for the French Armed Forces as part of the Joint Light Helicopter programme. The flight test crew consisted of Samuel Chartier, H160M flight test pilot, and flight test engineers Nicolas Certain, Laurent Maruejols, and Alban Corpron. The H160M's maiden flight was celebrated during an official ceremony at the Company's headquarters in France.

The H160M was chosen by France as a single platform to equip all three branches of the armed forces—the Army, Navy, and Air and Space Force. The French Ministry of Armed Forces plans to order 169 H160Ms to replace five types of helicopters currently in service with the French Armed Forces or recently retired.

The H160M builds on the civil H160 platform, which has been in service for over three years. Named "Guépard" by the French Armed Forces, the H160M features significant developments to make it one of the most modern military aircraft in the world. Airbus has opted to produce three prototypes to accelerate the H160M's development. A second prototype is currently in final assembly. The first prototype will primarily be used for validating the H160M's flight performance and will conduct firing campaigns in 2026. The second prototype will be used for hot and cold weather campaigns, among other tests.

"The start of the flight test campaign is a major milestone for the H160M programme. We have received excellent feedback from the French Navy on the performance of their six H160s, which have proven themselves with a high availability rate. Deployed for over two years on search and rescue missions at sea, these aircraft have demonstrated outstanding performance and reliability levels in a demanding environment," said Bruno Even, CEO of Airbus Helicopters. "The H160M is an aircraft tailored for tomorrow's military operations: reliable, agile, highly connected, and equipped with the latest generation of sensors and weaponry. Most importantly, it is highly scalable and can adapt to changing operational contexts."

The H160 is a 6-tonne class aircraft equipped with the Safran Arrano engines. It has benefited from 68 patents aimed at increasing its efficiency, safety, environmental footprint, maintenance, and operating costs compared to previous generation aircraft. The military version, the H160M, destined for the French Armed Forces, is equipped with Thales' FlytX avionics and a unique mission system developed by Airbus. These systems allow the crew to carry out complex missions in degraded environments with perfect tactical situational awareness.

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Numerous communication systems allow the H160M to be fully integrated into air, naval, and land-air operations. The H160M is the first helicopter in the Airbus range to be natively equipped with a drone cooperation system. The H160M also benefits from new-generation sensors such as Safran's Euroflir 410 electro-optical system and Thales' AirMaster C radar. The self-protection system is designed to operate across the entire electromagnetic and optical spectrum with automatic threat decoy capabilities.

Airbus' HForce weapon system allows for the integration of a wide range of effectors. The H160M will have the capability to carry 12.7 mm machine guns in pods and guided rockets. The H160M can also be equipped with 7.62 mm machine guns in a pintle mount or an articulated arm for a precision shooter.

Delivery to the French Armed Forces will begin in late 2028. Airbus will provide maintenance and operational support for the H160M for an initial period of ten years.

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Newsroom**Contacts for the media****Laurence Petiard**

AIRBUS

Helicopters

+33 6 18 79 75 69

laurence.petiard@airbus.com

Emmanuel Huberdeau

AIRBUS

Helicopters

+33 6 17 27 93 31

emmanuel.huberdeau@airbus.com

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