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TITLE=AMERICAN MOSAIC #832 - Helios Aircraft

BYLINE=Paul Thompson

HOST:

If you wanted to fly to the very edge of space, how would you do it? Once you got there, how long do you think you could stay? An aircraft powered by the sun might be able to stay near the edge of space for several days or maybe several months. Shep O' Neal has more.

ANNCR:

On August Thirteenth, an unusual looking aircraft of Project Helios set a new record during a test flight above the American state of Hawaii. It flew higher than any other aircraft in the world. It reached an altitude of twenty-nine-thousand-four-hundred-thirteen meters.

The Helios aircraft is an American space agency support project built by the Aerovironment Company of Monrovia, California. It has no pilot. It is controlled from the ground by radio. It looks like a huge wing without a tail. The wing is a little more than seventy-five meters long. That is longer than the wings on most large passenger airplanes. Fourteen electric motors turn fourteen propellers. The motors are powered by sixty-six-thousand solar cells that make electricity from sunlight.

NASA research scientists say this huge flying wing will have many uses in the future. They hope that a future Helios aircraft will be able to fly at extreme altitudes for several weeks or months. These aircraft could serve several purposes. These might include new and advanced methods of telling what the weather will be. For example, Helios could be used to observe the movement of huge ocean storms. It could fly high above their fierce winds. It could also be used as an advanced method of communications. It might also be used to observe the environment.

NASA scientists say this kind of aircraft will cost a great deal less than a satellite placed in space. And it will be able to do much of the same work. Scientists say this kind of aircraft might also be used to explore the planet Mars. They say it could fly long distances through the thin atmosphere and send pictures back to Earth.

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